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BEIJING REVIEW

VOL.68 NO.40-41 OCTOBER 2, 2025 北京周报 WWW.BJREVIEW.COM

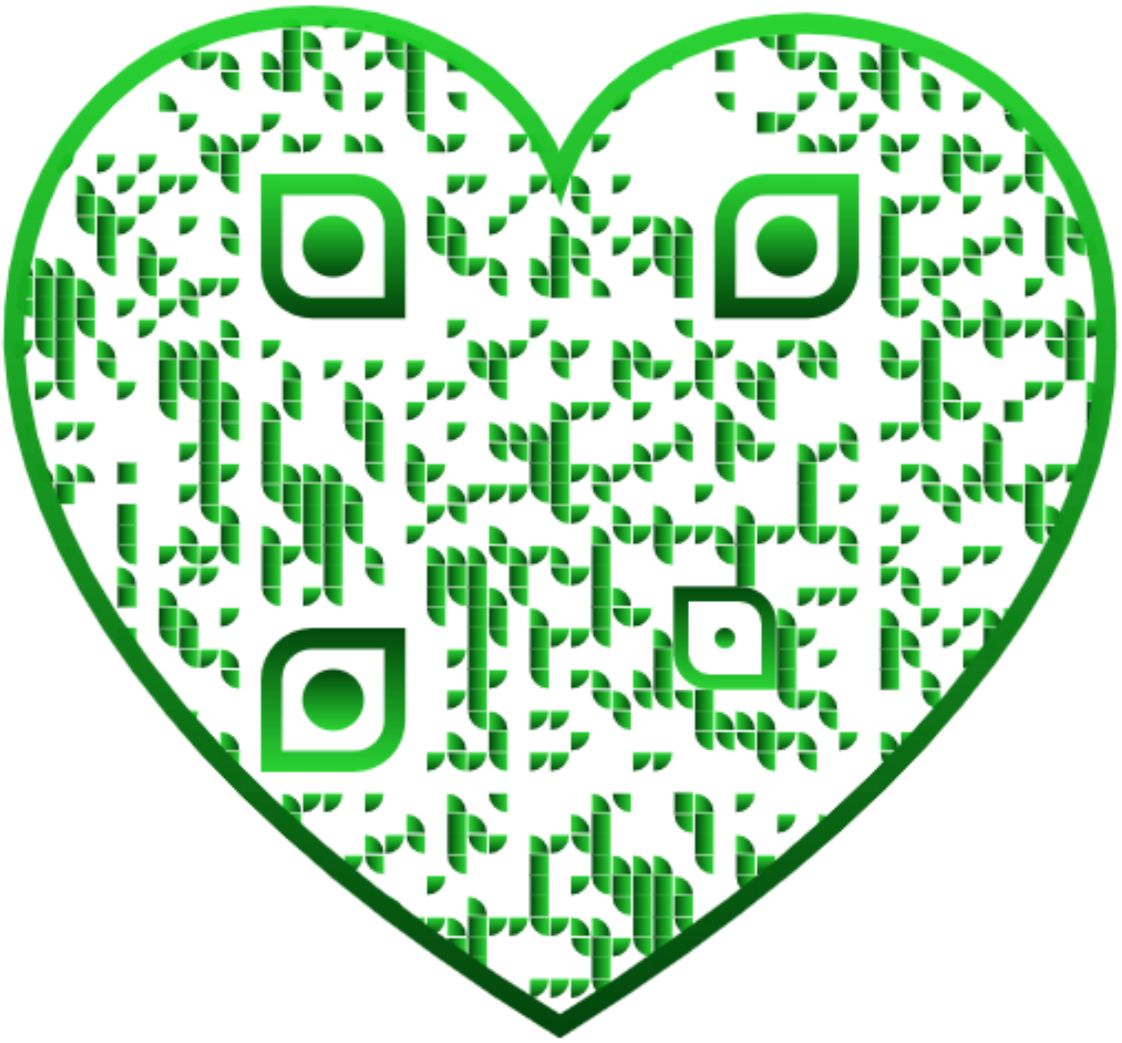
A PATH IN BLOOM

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, 70 years on

RMB9.00
USD1.70
AUD3.00
GBP1.20
CAD2.60
CHF2.60
JPY188

ISSN 1000-9140

邮发代号2-922 · 国内统一连续号：CN11-1576/G2



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Cover Photo: A floral arrangement celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in Urumqi on September 23 (WEI YAO)

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北京周报
BEIJINGREVIEW
A News Weekly Magazine
Published Since 1958

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E-mail: circulation@cicgamericas.com

Published every Thursday by
CICG Center for Americas, 24 Baiwanzhuang Lu,
Beijing 100037, China
Overseas Distributor: China International Book Trading Corporation (Guoji Shudian), P. O. BOX 399,
Beijing 100044, China
Tel: 86-10-68413849, 1-416-497-8096 (Canada)
Fax: 86-10-68412166
E-mail: fp@mail.cibtc.com.cn
Website: http://www.cibtc.com
General Distributor for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan:
Peace Book Co. Ltd.
17/Fl, Paramount Bldg, 12 Ka Yip St, Chai Wan, HK
Tel: 852-28046687 **Fax:** 852-28046409

Beijing Review (ISSN 1000-9140 USPS 2812) is published weekly in the United States for US$64.00 per year by Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080
News Postage Paid at Burlingame, CA 94010-9997
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Beijing Review*, Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080

A 70-Year Transformation

Xinjiang had been known as the Western Regions in China and governed by different dynasties for roughly 2,000 years. Throughout this long history, a key feature of its administration has been the respect for the customs of local ethnic groups.

In 1955, six years after the People's Republic of China was founded, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region was established as part of the country's efforts to promote equality, unity and mutual assistance among the country's 56 ethnic groups.

The Han people make up some 91 percent of China's population; the 55 other ethnic groups are collectively known as the ethnic minorities. In ethnic autonomous areas, local people's congresses are the state organs through which they exercise self-governance. These legislatures can formulate autonomous regulations and local-specific laws. A major principle of this system is that the head of an autonomous area must belong to its namesake ethnic group. For instance, the government chairperson of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region must always be a Uygur.

Since the region's establishment 70 years ago, this vast, ethnically diverse place has undergone a transformation that few could have imagined back then. In the 1950s, the first major change came about through the exploration of energy resources. With the development of the Karamay oilfield, the first large oilfield discovered after the founding of the People's Republic, Xinjiang began supplying crude oil to the nation. Coalmines, natural gas deposits and, more recently, massive wind and solar farms have turned the region into an energy powerhouse. Other economic pillars, including agriculture, have also been revolutionized. While traditional oasis farming once depended on manual and animal labor, modern systems make use of drip irrigation, mechanized planting and harvesting, and high-yield seed varieties.

Social progress has kept pace with economic growth. In November 2020, Xinjiang announced it had eliminated absolute poverty, following a targeted poverty alleviation campaign that began in the early 2010s together with other parts of China.

Xinjiang's journey since 1955 illustrates how coordinated efforts to promote ethnic solidarity, energize the economy and upgrade social welfare can transform an underdeveloped hinterland into a frontier of opening up and development. Today, the region is better equipped than ever to sustain its upward trajectory and play a greater part in China's national rejuvenation drive. **BR**

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JAPAN.....JPY188 EUROPE.....EUR1.90
TÜRKIYE.....YTL5.00 HK.....HKD9.30 NEPAL.....RS40

主管单位：中国外文出版发行事业局
主办单位：中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）
出版单位：中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）
地址：北京市西城区百万庄大街24号 邮编：100037
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主编：闫威
总编室电话：(010) 68996252 发行部电话：(010) 68310644
印刷：北京华联印刷有限公司
北京周报 英文版2025年 第40-41期 ISSN 1000-9140
国内统一连续出版物号：CN11-1576/G2 邮发代号：2-922
广告许可证0171号 北京市期刊登记证第733号
国内零售价：人民币9.00元

XINHUA

TYPHOON TAKEOVER

An uprooted tree on the roadside in Yangjiang City, Guangdong Province, on September 24. Typhoon *Ragasa*, the 18th named storm of the 2025 Pacific typhoon season, made landfall in the province that same day.

The typhoon churned ashore at Hailing Island in Yangjiang, with the maximum wind force near its center reaching 40 meters per second.

As of 10 p.m. on September 23, more than 1.89 million local residents had been relocated across Guangdong.

XINHUA

Robotics Roar

A humanoid robot dances at the 2025 World Manufacturing Convention in Hefei, Anhui Province, on September 20. The convention, which ran from September 20 to 23, showcased intelligent robotics, offering visitors a glimpse into how robots are stepping out of science fiction and into reality.

Grain Harvest

China is expected to secure a bumper grain harvest this year, according to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on September 23.

To date, nearly 20 percent of this year's autumn grain has been harvested nationwide. A stable summer grain output and an increase in early rice production laid a solid foundation for the country's annual grain harvest despite the droughts and floods it experienced earlier this year, the ministry said.

The summer grain output reached 149.74 million tons, and the early rice output came in at 28.52 million tons, up 340,000 tons from last year, data from the ministry showed.

Autumn crops are the mainstay of China's annual grain production, and their planting area has been expanded and they are growing better than average.

Technological advancement has become a key grain-harvest booster, with its contribution rate rising to 63.2 percent. New corn, soybean and rice varieties developed by the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences have supported the grain yield increase to a substantial degree.

Advanced domestic farming machinery such as hybrid tractors and orchard robots are also being applied to improve efficiency.

Green Methanol Bunkering

The dual-fuel "ro-ro" (roll-on/roll-off) ship CM HONG KONG completed the bunkering of 300 tons of green methanol at Tianjin Port in north China on September 23, marking the country's first green methanol refueling for a ro-ro vessel.

Sinopec Fuel Oil Sales Co. Ltd. conducted the operation using green methanol sourced from Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, which is produced from waste tires and biomass and can cut carbon dioxide emission by around 460 tons per refueling compared to conventional fuels.

Tianjin, a key port city with proximity to green methanol production bases in north China, is actively advancing its green fuel industry. The port is equipped with dedicated infrastructure, including specialized liquid chemical berths, methanol storage tanks and dedicated railway lines.

The wider adoption of green methanol is poised to drive the energy transformation of the shipping sector and contribute significantly to international emission reduction goals, according to industry analysts.

Criminal Group Trialed

A court in south China has tried 21 members of a criminal group that operates in north Myanmar on charges including fraud, intentional homicide, kidnapping and operating casinos.

The first-instance trial of the main lawsuit concerning the criminal gang took place on September 19-22 at the Shenzhen Intermediate People's Court in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province.

The Shenzhen People's Procuratorate charged the members of the gang, which is headed by Bay Saw Chain and Bay Yin Chin, of taking advantage of the influence that the Bay family holds in the Kokang region of Myanmar to build 41 compounds, and of providing armed protection to people operating illegal businesses there since August 2009.

The gang was accused of conspiring with the people it protected to commit crimes such as telecom fraud, intentional homicide, intentional injury, kidnapping, extortion, operating casinos, organizing illegal border crossings, and organizing and forcing prostitution, which left six Chinese citizens dead and more injured. Its gambling- and fraud-related funds exceeded 20 billion yuan ($2.8 billion), according to the procuratorate.

The verdict will be announced at a later date.

Coal Output

China's coal-rich province of Shanxi reported more than 862 million tons of raw coal production in the first eight months of 2025, a 5.2-percent year-on-year increase, according to local authorities, Xinhua News Agency reported on September 22.

As the country's top coal producer, Shanxi contributed 27.3 percent of China's total output during the period to ensure that the high summer demand for electricity is met, the provincial statistics bureau said.

Over the years, Shanxi has been continuously upgrading its coal industry. As of late 2024, it had built 55 pilot and demonstration mines for green mining. According to the 2025 provincial government work report, Shanxi plans to build 130 new intelligent coal mines this year.

A report released by the Ministry of Natural Resources shows that by the end of 2022, the country's total coal reserves had reached 207 billion tons, with Shanxi holding approximately 48.3 billion tons of those reserves.

Takeoffs and Landings

The Chinese Navy said on September 22 that carrier-based aircraft J-15T, J-35 and KongJing-600 have successfully completed their inaugural electromagnetic catapult-assisted takeoff and arrested landing trainings on aircraft carrier, the *Fujian*.

The success showed that China's first domestically built catapult-equipped aircraft carrier has obtained electromagnetic catapult launch and recovery capabilities—another breakthrough in the development of China's aircraft carriers.

J-15T, J-35 and KongJing-600 were showcased during China's massive military parade held on September 3 to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War.

The trainings verified the sound compatibility of China's fully domestically developed electromagnetic catapult and arresting systems with multiple aircraft types, according to the navy.

This demonstrated that the *Fujian* has obtained initial full-deck operational capability, paving the way for multiple types of carrier-based aircraft to join the carrier formation, the navy said.

Since its first sea trials in May 2024, the *Fujian* has carried out a series of maritime tests according to plan, progressing with equipment commissioning and assessments of overall operational stability.

Medical Insurance

China has expanded its rare disease catalog to 207 conditions and included nearly 100 rare disease drugs in its medical insurance scheme, according to information released at the 2025 China Conference on Rare Diseases, which concluded on September 21.

Due to their low incidence, small patient populations and high research and development costs, rare diseases have received limited attention in the healthcare field. Through coordinated inter-agency efforts, China has accelerated the development of a system for the prevention and treatment of such diseases, making drugs more accessible and affordable for the patients.

In 2024, China's medical insurance fund allocated 8.6 billion yuan ($1.2 billion) to include rare disease drugs in its coverage, accounting for about 7.7 percent of total payments.

Beyond expanding insurance coverage for such drugs, China has also advanced its national rare disease diagnosis and treatment collaboration network, which now includes 419 medical institutions.

"While rare disease diagnosis and treatment may seem like a 'niche need,' it is actually a critical measure of medical and social progress," said Zhang Shuyang, President of Peking Union Medical College Hospital and a rare disease expert.

"It not only upholds the dignity of individual lives but also drives medical and social progress toward greater precision and equity," Zhang added.

XINHUA

Cultural Curiosity

Guests visit the eighth Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo in Dunhuang, Gansu Province, on September 21. More than 1,200 representatives from 97 countries and eight international organizations gathered at the expo, which ran on September 20-22 in Dunhuang.

XINHUA

Flipping Through the Fair

The Beijing Book Fair 2025 at Ditan Park, also known as the Temple of Earth, in Beijing on September 22. The 11-day fair, themed Read to Become a Better You, concluded on that day.

5G Base Stations

The number of 5G base stations in China reached nearly 4.65 million by the end of August, official data showed on September 23.

The figure accounted for 36.3 percent of the total number of mobile base stations nationwide, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT).

Meanwhile, an increasing number of Chinese mobile users are adopting 5G services.

As of late August, the number of mobile phone users of the country's three major telecommunication enterprises—China Mobile, China Unicom and China Telecom, and China Broadcasting Network Corp. Ltd. (China Broadnet), the country's fourth largest telecom operator, had reached about 1.82 billion, the data showed.

Among them, over 1.15 billion were 5G mobile phone users, a net increase of 140 million from the end of last year, accounting for 63.4 percent of total mobile phone users.

Power Use

China's electricity consumption, a key barometer of economic activity, continued its steady growth in August, according to data from the National Energy Administration on September 23.

The country's total power use increased 5 percent year on year to nearly 1.02 trillion kilowatt-hours (kwh) in August, according to the data.

The primary industry saw a 9.7-percent increase in power consumption, which totaled 16.4 billion kwh.

The secondary industry consumed 598.1 billion kwh, up 5 percent from a year ago, while the tertiary industry registered a 7.2-percent rise in power use to 204.6 billion kwh.

Power consumption by the country's residents rose 2.4 percent to 196.3 billion kwh.

In the first eight months of the year, China's total electricity consumption climbed 4.6 percent year on year to nearly 6.88 trillion kwh.

Tech Stocks

Technology companies now make up a larger share of China's A-share market as the country steps up capital market support for sci-tech innovation, Wu Qing, Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said at a press conference on the country's financial progress during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period on September 22.

A-shares are the stocks of incorporated companies based on the Chinese mainland and listed on mainland stock exchanges.

Technology companies account for more than a quarter of the A-share market capitalization, which is considerably higher than the combined market cap of the banking, non-bank financial and real estate sectors, Wu said.

In recent years, more than 90 percent of newly listed companies have been technology companies or those with a high level of technological expertise, he said.

Among the top 50 companies by market cap, the number of technology companies had increased to 24 from 18 by the end of the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) period, Wu said.

Steel Industry Upgrading

Chinese authorities have issued a work plan to support the steady operation and structural upgrading of the country's steel industry, according to the MIIT on September 22.

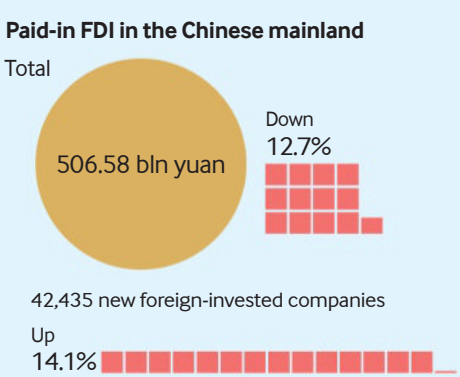
For the 2025-26 period, China's steel industry aims for its value-added output growth to reach an average annual rate of around 4 percent, with improved economic performance, better balanced market supply and demand, and a more optimized industrial structure, the work plan says. It was jointly released by the MIIT and four other government organs.

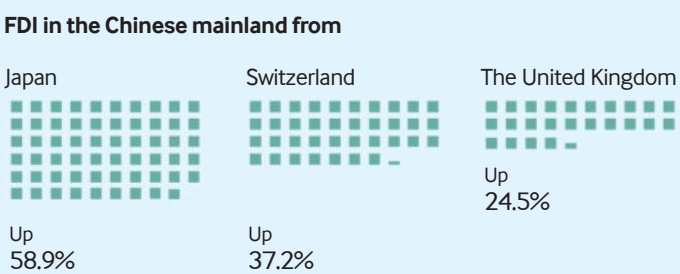
Industry management must be strengthened to phase out backward and inefficient production capacity in the steel sector, support competitive enterprises and promote a balanced market, it adds.

NUMBERS

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in January-August

(All growth rates are y.o.y., $1=7.1 yuan as of September 25)





Technological innovation in the steel industry must be enhanced to boost high-end product supply, upgrade the quality of bulk materials and stabilize the supply of raw and fuel materials, the work plan states.

It further notes that effective investment in the steel industry should be expanded—to accelerate technological upgrades, digital transformation and green transition.

The application of steel structures in construction, transportation and infrastructure should be expanded, as part of efforts to unleash consumption potential.

The work plan also stresses the importance of deepening opening up and cooperation in the steel sector.

Foreign-Invested Enterprises

A total of 42,435 foreign-invested enterprises were established on the Chinese mainland from January to August, increasing 14.8 percent year on year, the Ministry of Commerce said on September 19.

During this period, paid-in foreign direct investment (FDI) totaled 506.58 billion yuan ($71 billion), down 12.7 percent year on year.

The paid-in FDI during the period came in at 129.03 billion yuan ($18 billion) in the manufacturing industry, and at 366.19 billion yuan ($51 billion) in the services industry.

The paid-in FDI in China's hi-tech sectors totaled 148.28 billion yuan ($21 billion), with FDI in the e-commerce services, aerospace equipment manufacturing, chemical pharmaceutical manufacturing and medical instrument manufacturing sectors surging 169.2 percent, 37.5 percent, 23.2 percent and 19.2 percent, respectively.

Investment from Japan, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Singapore grew 58.9 percent, 37.2 percent, 24.5 percent and 1.8 percent.

Forex Market

China's foreign exchange (forex) market maintained steady operations in August, reporting active market trading, as well as balanced supply and demand, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange said on September 19.

Cross-border receipts and payments of non-banking sectors—including enterprises and individuals—hit $1.3 trillion that month, up 8 percent year on year. Both current and capital account cross-border transactions saw growth, with steady development in cross-border trade and investment financing, said Li Bin, deputy head of the administration.

Supply and demand in the forex market remained generally balanced in August, Li added.

Cross-border capital saw a net inflow of $3.2 billion, while the banking sector posted a net surplus of $14.6 billion in forex settlements and sales.

Net capital inflows in the trade in goods remained stable, with foreign investors maintaining their overall net purchases of domestic stocks and bonds, but net outflows in the services trade and investment income funds retreated from their seasonal peaks.

Civil Air Transportation

The civil aviation sector saw total transportation turnover surge 8 percent year on year to reach a historical high of 15.18 billion ton-km in August, data from the Civil Aviation Administration of China (CAAC) showed on September 19.

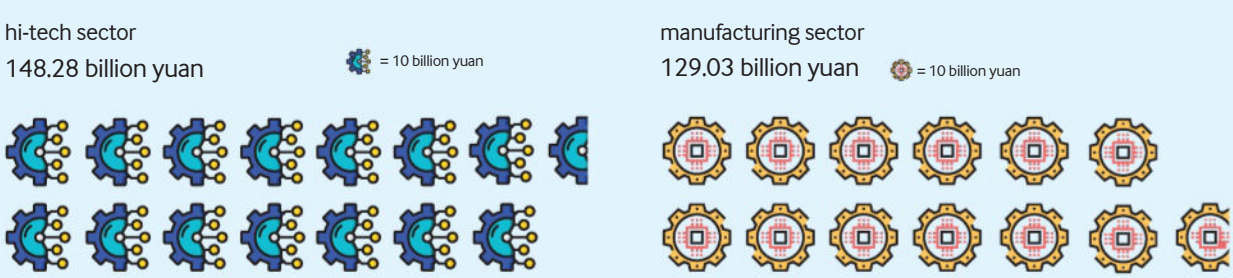
In the first eight months of 2025, total air transportation turnover was 108.33 billion ton-km, an increase of 10.5 percent from the same period last year, according to the CAAC.

More than 6.51 million tons of cargo and mail were transported by air during the eight-month period, up 14.5 percent year on year.

In August, over 75.36 million air passenger trips were completed, up 3.3 percent year on year. International passenger traffic saw a more robust expansion, growing by 15.3 percent to reach 7.47 million trips.

From January to August, the number of air passenger trips went up 5.3 percent year on year to 520 million, according to CAAC data.

FDI in the Chinese mainland into



(Source: *Ministry of Commerce*)

KUWAIT

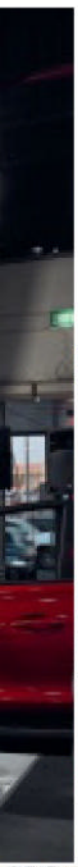
The Auto World Show in Hawalli Governorate on September 22. The six-day event concluded on September 27

SERBIA

A military parade in honor of the Day of Serbian Unity, Freedom and the National Flag in Belgrade on September 20

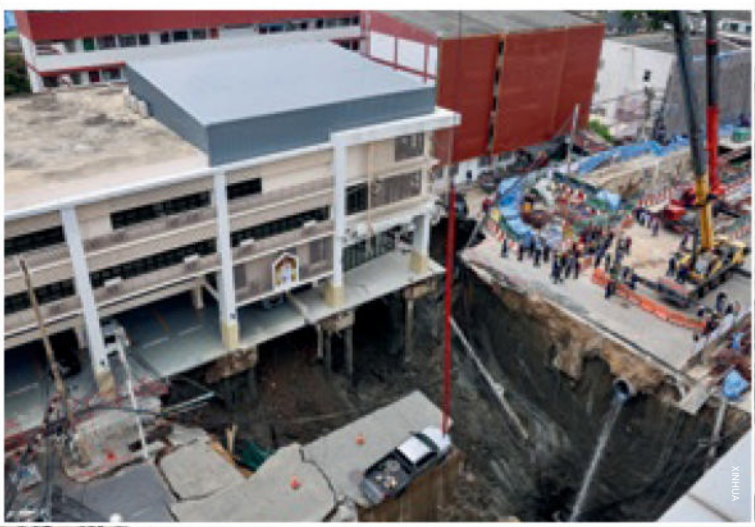
VENEZUELA

Protestors march along Bolivar Avenue, Caracas, on September 23, in a demonstration of support for President Nicolás Maduro and in rejection of the destabilization policies that, they claim, are promoted by the U.S. Government



THAILAND

A 50-meter-deep sinkhole caused by a major road collapse outside Vajira Hospital in Bangkok on September 24



FRANCE

Waitstaff dressed in their work uniforms participate in the traditional Course des Cafés in Paris, on September 21. The race course spans 4 km, along which competitors carry a tray with water, a coffee cup and a croissant

ITALY

Pro-Palestine protesters confront police in front of Milan's Central Station on September 22

SCI-FI WRITER WINS MAJOR AWARDS

Novelist **Yang Wanqing** won the top award at the 16th Xingyun Awards for Chinese Science Fiction (sci-fi) on September 20 for his novel *Jintao* (*Golden Peaches*).

The fable, set in China's Tang Dynasty (618-907) and intertwining humanity, machines and history, claimed the Novel of 2024 golden trophy. It tells a story about a super algorithm inspired by ancient Chinese mathematical classics that drives the functioning of ancient civilizations.

The Xingyun Awards, also known as the Chinese Nebula Awards, were established in 2010 and have now become widely recognized industry awards.

A day earlier, Yang won the Galaxy Award, China's oldest sci-fi accolade, for the same novel. Yang, 42, works in the finance industry in Kunming, Yunnan Province.

High-Altitude Outrage

Workers' Daily

September 23

Local authorities in Xigaze, a city in Xizang Autonomous Region, have launched an investigation after outdoor apparel brand Arc'teryx partnered with Chinese artist Cai Guoqiang to stage a fireworks show at the foot of the Himalayas on September 19.

Despite claims of using eco-friendly materials to minimize environmental risk, the show has drawn public outrage over its potential disruption to the extremely fragile Himalayan ecosystem. In the affected locality, alpine meadows recover far more slowly than lowland terrain, and wildlife habitats, once destroyed, could take decades to recover. Questions also remain over whether environmental standards used in lowland areas also apply to high-altitude regions, where biodegradable materials may break down at a much slower rate.

This recent controversy invites a broader examination of how business, art and environmental responsibilities should interact with one another. Should business and art activities in fragile high-altitude ecosystems abide by stricter environmental standards? How can firms integrate sustainability into their core values rather than treat it as marketing gloss? And when artistic ambitions risk harming nature, what ethical guardrails should guide creative activities? Such questions demand more than procedural compliance—they call for a deeper reflection on the real cost of human activities.

China's Classical Crescendo

Lifeweek

September 22

Over the past decade, the number of professional symphony orchestras in China has more than doubled to over 80, underpinning China's emergence as a new musical powerhouse in the world.

These ensembles are steadily cultivating a new generation of listeners, and their strategies are as inventive as their shows.

The Shanghai Symphony Orchestra,

"China's decision reflects a commitment to a more balanced and equitable global trading system."

World Trade Organization (WTO) Director General **Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, commenting on a recent announcement by China that it will not seek new special and differential treatment in current and future WTO negotiations

"On a global scale, China's education system is the largest and of high quality, providing strong assurance that the younger generation has equal access to education."

Education Minister **Huai Jinpeng**, at a September 23 press conference, adding China's basic education has reached the average level of high-income countries

for instance, has introduced a rush-hour concert series. Unlike regular evening concerts that begin at 8 p.m. and usually last for two hours, this series start at 6:30 p.m. and wrap up in just one hour, allowing the audience from nearby communities to enjoy classical music and avoid rush hour traffic without disrupting their evening plans.

Elsewhere, orchestras are capitalizing on the power of social media. Established in 2012, the relatively young Xi'an Symphony Orchestra in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, has amassed nearly 400,000 followers on video-sharing platform Bilibili, where it first became a social media phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic for its shows in two unexpected locations: a rocket launch site in Wenchang, Hainan Province, and on the top of Mount Huashan in Shaanxi.

The spread of classical music has also extended beyond China's biggest cities. In Guiyang, capital of Guizhou Province, where café density now rivals Shanghai and craft beer is all the rage, the Guiyang Symphony Orchestra stands out as the country's first privately funded symphony. Its success, together with the rising numbers of local cafés and bars, reflects a broader youth culture that prizes experimentation as much as tradition.

Leave It to the Dads

Guangzhou Daily
September 19

For many Chinese couples, the idea of parenthood is clouded by worries over cost, time and career prospects. In 2021, China introduced a new parental-leave policy aimed at easing these anxieties, which has prompted various cities and provinces to grant eligible parents 5 to 20 days of leave each year until their child turns 3, with some extending it to age 6.

Taking such leave, however, has proved far harder than it sounds. Employees often find their requests denied or mired in red tape, with fathers facing even steeper resistance. The imbalance reflects a long-standing belief that mothers, not fathers, are the natural caregivers and therefore should take more responsibility in raising a child.

Parental leave is intended to challenge that mindset by giving men the same rights and responsibilities as women in childcare. However, extended leaves may also disrupt workflows, increase overtime and burnout for remaining staff and lower overall productivity. Stronger incentives are needed to encourage employers to grant this type of leave, along with tighter oversight to make sure that this new parental leave policy is carried through.

AI ENTREPRENEUR PROMOTES TRANSPARENCY

Liang Wenfeng, founder of AI startup DeepSeek, has recently coauthored a paper to reveal how AI can learn to articulate its reasoning.

Published in leading peer-reviewed journal *Nature*, the paper is viewed as a step toward greater AI transparency as it focuses on "reinforcement learning," or learning through a trial-error-reward process instead of human annotations.

The DeepSeek-R1's architecture facilitates "the emergent development of advanced reasoning patterns, such as self-reflection, verification and dynamic strategy adaptation," according to the study. The model beats its counterparts trained through conventional supervised learning on verifiable tasks such as mathematics.

Since DeepSeek's debut last year, China's generative AI firms have been racing to promote an open-source system by launching and updating their foundation models, which researchers and the public can freely download, use, test and build upon.

"Cutting-edge technologies help us conserve artifacts, predict potential risks and offer immersive virtual experiences for visitors."

Liu Yuzhu, head of the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, at the 2025 World Internet Conference Cultural Heritage Digitalization Forum in Xi'an, Shaanxi Province, in mid-September

"Hotpot is not just a taste adventure; it is also a social catalyst."

Chen Guohua, Chairman of the Chongqing Hotpot Association, who has led efforts to promote hotpot culture in Southeast Asia, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

COVER STORY

A PORTRAIT OF XINJIANG AT 70

Seven decades since its establishment as an autonomous region, Xinjiang finds its rhythm By Yuan Yuan

XINHUA

Chinese President Xi Jinping, also General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chairman of the Central Military Commission, attends a grand gathering in celebration of the 70th founding anniversary of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in Urumqi, the region's capital, on September 25

The smoky aroma of sizzling barbecue fills the evening air in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, mingling with the sweet scent from fruit stalls and the pulsating energy of the crowds at the city's International Grand Bazaar. As daylight fades, building facades transform into colossal canvases for a spectacular light show, weaving a luminous tapestry celebrating the 70th founding anniversary of the autonomous region.

This vast land, accounting for one sixth of China's territory, stands as a vibrant tapestry of diverse ethnic cultures and a major hub along the Belt and Road Initiative, a China-proposed framework that boosts connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes. Its 70-year journey of development is now being celebrated across the region.

A grand gathering was held on September 25 in Urumqi in celebration of the 70th founding anniversary of the autonomous region, which was attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping, along with other participants. A themed exhibition in Urumqi offers a panoramic view of these achievements, showcasing the unity, diligence and perseverance of Xinjiang's people over the past seven decades. On display are historical footage, industrial products, restored scenes of a department store, poverty alleviation achievements, ethnic unity exhibitions and maps illustrating the region's increasing openness.

During a September 24 visit to the exhibition, Xi emphasized that the profound changes in Xinjiang over the past 70 years are a vivid reflection of the historic process of national rejuvenation, noting that the Communist Party of China (CPC)'s policy for the governance of Xinjiang in the new era is both scientific and effective, and must be adhered to for the long term.

On the same day, after listening to work reports from the CPC Xinjiang regional committee and the regional government in Urumqi, Xi urged the autonomous region to build a socialist modern Xinjiang that is characterized by unity, harmony, prosperity, affluence, cultural progress and a sound eco-environment, where people live and work in peace and contentment.

Lived experiences

The region's progress is detailed in a white paper titled Guidelines for ▸▸

Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements, released by the State Council Information Office on September 19. According to the document, Xinjiang's GDP grew from approximately 749.95 billion yuan ($105 billion) in 2012, the year when Xi was elected general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, to over 2.05 trillion yuan ($287 billion) in 2024, exceeding the 2 trillion yuan threshold for the first time with an average annual growth rate of 7 percent. Per-capita GDP increased from 33,495 yuan ($4,700) to 78,660 yuan ($11,000) during the same period, while general public budget revenue jumped from nearly 90.9 billion yuan ($13 billion) to approximately 240.97 billion yuan ($33 billion)—an average annual increase of over 10 billion yuan ($1.4 billion).

These macro-level achievements are mirrored in the daily local life. Gu Xiangfeng, who has been a bus driver in Urumqi for three decades, shared his observations at the grand gathering in celebration of the 70th founding anniversary.

"When I started working, Urumqi's roads were mostly gravel, turning muddy with rain or snow. The old gasoline buses were like steamers in summer and iceboxes in winter." Today, bumpy dirt roads have been replaced by flat asphalt avenues, and green new energy vehicles have superseded the old buses. "It's common now to see visitors from across the country capturing the city with their phones," he added.

The transformation is equally palpable in pastoral areas. Martinbek Muratkhan, a 63-year-old retired Kazak tax official from Fuyun County, Altay Prefecture, noted, "As a nomadic people, we used to move frequently with our herds, without a permanent home. Now, the government has built settled housing for us." Recalling his childhood, he said, "The school was very far away, and sometimes we had to ride a bull to get there. Now, school buses pick up children at their doorsteps." This transition from nomadism to settled communities sparked a fundamental shift for many families.

Improvements also extend to daily life here. "In the past, we often didn't have enough food. Now, we have such abundance and quality that we actually need to watch our diets," Martinbek said. These advances are reflected in health outcomes: Average life expectancy in Xinjiang has risen from 30 years in 1949 to over 70 years today.

"Now it is very convenient for us to get medical care," he said. The white paper shows that by 2024, the region's public health system comprised more than 19,000 medical

Principles and Requirements

CPC Guidelines for Governing Xinjiang in the New Era: Practice and Achievements, a white paper released by the State Council Information Office in September, has outlined the Party's vision for Xinjiang's governance. Some of its main components follow:

To govern the region in accordance with the law, we should uphold Xi Jinping Thought on the Rule of Law, advance law-based governance, promote its concept across society, adhere to its principles, and implement its requirements in all sectors of the work related to Xinjiang. We should employ law-based thinking and approaches to forestall risks, combat crimes, handle problems, and address disputes, and strengthen law-based and persistent efforts in combating terrorism and maintaining stability, thereby ensuring that all the work related to Xinjiang is carried out under the rule of law.

To maintain stability through ethnic unity, the fundamental issue is to rally people's support. We should regard ethnic unity as the lifeline of the people of all ethnic groups, safeguard the unity of the Chinese nation, and continue to foster a stronger sense of the Chinese nation as one community. We should make systematic efforts to ensure that religions in China conform to China's realities, to unite the people of all ethnic groups closer around the Party, and to forge tremendous momentum to build a beautiful Xinjiang.

To strengthen cultural identity and bonds, we should see that people in Xinjiang identify with the Chinese culture. Upholding the core socialist values, we should develop advanced socialist culture, promote revolutionary culture, carry forward the best of traditional Chinese culture, and build a spiritual home shared by all the Chinese people. We should provide education and guidance to the people of all ethnic groups to strengthen their sense of Chinese national identity, and reinforce their political commitment and win their support, thus consolidating the ideological foundations for social stability and lasting peace and security.

To bring greater prosperity to Xinjiang and its people, we should fully and faithfully apply the new development philosophy on all fronts in line with the strategic positioning of Xinjiang in building a great modern socialist country. Giving full play to Xinjiang's advantages in geographic location, resources, and policies, we should actively support Xinjiang in serving and integrating with the new development dynamic and promoting high-quality opening up. We should advance high-quality development centered on the people's wellbeing, and ensure that the benefits of development improve the people's wellbeing and win their support.

To develop Xinjiang from a long-term perspective, we should uphold and strengthen the Party's overall leadership and advance the great new project of strengthening the Party in the new era. We should foster highly competent officials based on the criteria for assessing the caliber of officials in the new era, maintain our strategic resolve, and make meticulous plans before taking any actions. We should pursue progress while ensuring stability, devote continued and long-term sustained efforts in our work, and address deep-rooted problems, to lay solid foundations for achieving the overall goal of the work related to Xinjiang.

XINHUA

President Xi Jinping waves to the crowds gathering to see him off at Urumqi Tianshan International Airport in Xinjiang on September 25

institutions and 314,600 healthcare professionals. A total of 86.05 percent of counties had established closely integrated medical consortia, with all township health centers and village clinics meeting operational standards. This tiered system ensures that local residents can access care for minor issues within their communities, common diseases at county-level facilities, and serious conditions within the autonomous region.

Progress in public infrastructure, too, has been unmistakable. Martinbek recalled that traveling from his village to Altay once took over 10 hours; now, it takes just two. Not only is travel within Xinjiang more convenient, but connections beyond the region have also vastly improved.

Rediscovering Xinjiang

"Even as someone who grew up in Xinjiang, I feel I have to rediscover it each time I return for inspiration," Huang Jianxin, a local painter, told *Beijing Review*. Born in 1949, he moved to Hotan as an infant and has lived there ever since. Specializing in Xinjiang's landscapes, with two works displayed at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, Huang remarked, "In recent years, while sketching here, I've been struck by how tremendously the region has changed."

During a recent trip to Tashkurgan in south Xinjiang, he observed that the number of decent hotels had surged from two a decade ago to over 140—a 70-fold increase. He also fulfilled a long-held dream by visiting Waqia Township, previously inaccessible due to poor roads. "I'd wanted to go since the 1980s or 1990s, when it took two days to get there. Last year, a concrete mountain road reduced the journey to three hours by car, with paved roads leading to every household. Finally seeing Waqia's scenery was like discovering a hidden paradise," he said.

The white paper notes substantial transportation upgrades: The highway network expanded from 165,900 km in 2012 to 230,000 km in 2024, reaching all prefectures and ▶▶

over 90 percent of counties. Railway mileage grew from 4,914 km to 9,202 km, connecting all prefectures and more than 80 percent of counties. The region is now served by 595 civil air routes, including 25 international routes to 17 countries and regions, forming an aviation network that links east and west. Xinjiang has also mapped out plans for 10 types of infrastructure networks covering railways, highways, aviation, energy, logistics and computing.

The upgraded transportation network has largely boosted tourism in the region. Huang believes tourists are increasingly drawn not only to Xinjiang's natural beauty but also to its cultural richness. The region's multi-ethnic character has become a tourism highlight, with growing interest in local handicrafts.

Ayiguli Maimaiti, a 48-year-old Uygur woman, moved from Kashgar to Urumqi with her husband Ainijiang Younusi 30 years ago to pursue their craft. Both hail from artisan families—Ayiguli's father made Yingjisha knives. Reflecting on her childhood in a mud-brick home in Kashgar's Ancient City, she recalled her father's struggle to support the family through knife-making. Today, she told *Beijing Review*, artisans find it easier to earn a living thanks to tourists' growing appreciation for Xinjiang's handicrafts.

The couple now runs a shop at the Grand Bazaar specializing in painted drums and handmade instruments, a trade their two sons have continued by opening their own shops in Urumqi. To them, the bazaar is a wall-less stage for ethnic interaction, where Uygur instruments, Kazak songs and tourist laughter intermingle. Their dozen or so instruments offer visitors a window into Xinjiang.

The white paper highlights

CNSPHOTO

Locals pick grapes in Turpan, Xinjiang, on July 9

XINHUA

A drone sprays pesticide in a cotton field in Yuli County, Xinjiang, on September 19

efforts to integrate culture and tourism, enabling visitors to experience both Xinjiang's landscapes and its profound culture. A development plan aims to build cultural and tourist industry clusters worth over $1 trillion ($141 billion). Initiatives like the Taklimakan Rally, Tour of Sayram Lake Road Cycling Race and Freeride World Tour promote sports tourism, with the industrial cluster effect becoming increasingly apparent. Tourist visits to Xinjiang surged from 48.6 million in 2012 to 302 million in 2024—a 6.21-fold increase—while tourism revenue reached 359.5 billion yuan ($50 billion) in 2024.

President Xi urged for the further promotion of cultural tourism on September 24, enhanced ecosystem preservation, and the accelerated development of Xinjiang as a core area along the Silk Road Economic Belt.

Huang emphasized Xinjiang's growing role within the Belt and Road Initiative. "With visa-free access to five Central Asian countries—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan—more international tourists will come, strengthening ties between Xinjiang and Central Asia," he said. Noting an upcoming oil painting exhibition in Kazakhstan, he added, "More artists from Central Asia will likely visit Xinjiang. The Belt and Road is not only an economic corridor, but a cultural one as well." **BR**

(*Reporting from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*)

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
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WEIYAO

Visitors pose for photos in Urumqi on September 25

70 YEARS OF PROGRESS

23.302 million tons

Food output in 2024, ranking 13th nationwide. Xinjiang's food output surpassed 5 million tons in 1986, 10 million tons in 2009 and 20 million tons in 2023. For statistical purposes in China, "food" refers to grains, beans, potatoes and sweet potatoes

14.17 million tons

The amount of food transferred from Xinjiang to other parts of China from 2022 to 2024. Xinjiang is one of the seven provincial-level regions in China that is a net producer of food

5.686 million tons

Cotton output in 2024, accounted for 92.2 percent of the national total, up from 2.9175 million tons in 2010 and 5,000 tons in 1949

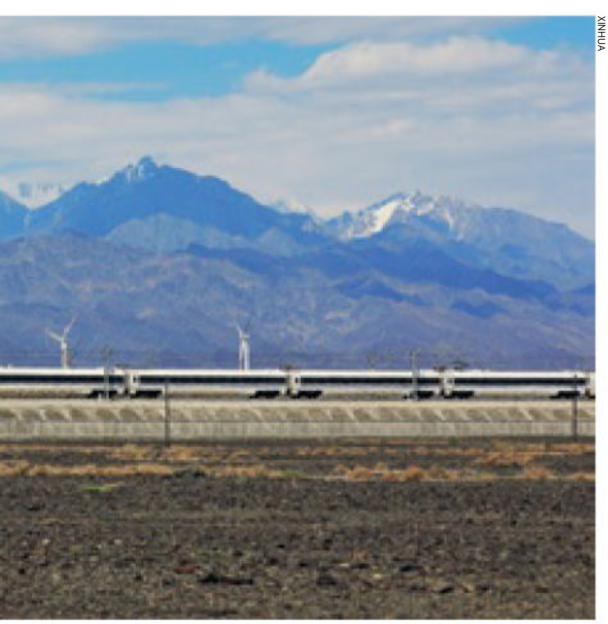
32.958 million tons

Crude oil output in 2024, up from 23.9373 million tons in 2005 and 32,900 tons in 1955

XINHUA

Residents of Hongdun Town in Altay Prefecture, Xinjiang, pose for a photo on September 9. Hongdun is home to 11 ethnic groups, with the ethnic minorities making up 51 percent of the town's population

A high-speed train travels past wind turbines in Urumqi in June 2021



XINHUA

42.268 billion cubic meters

Natural gas output in 2024, up from 10.624 billion cubic meters in 2005 and 8.8 million cubic meters in 1955

77 years

Average life expectancy in 2024, up from 60 years in 1985 and 30 years in 1949 when the People's Republic of China was founded

230,000 km

Total length of highways in operation in 2024, up from 23,800 km in 1978 and 3,400 km in 1949

6.6792 million

Number of registered civilian vehicles in 2024, up from 2.1107 million in 2012 and 41,600 in 1978

28

Number of civil airports in operation, up from 17 in 2012 and one in 1949

(Source: *Ts.cn, Xinjiang's official news portal*)

COVER STORY

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITIES

From longer life expectancy to higher incomes, Xinjiang celebrates milestone improvements By Lu Yan

A quiet revolution is underway in the vast cotton fields of Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture in north Xinjiang where harvesting machines, guided by digital sensors, operate with minimal human intervention. According to Aoqierbate, head of the prefecture's Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, now hundreds of hectares of cotton can be harvested by just one or two machine operators.

Dilinur comes from a farming family in Bortala. In the past, the family's livelihood depended entirely on the weather. Farming was time-consuming and a year's harvest could be wiped out by heavy rain or thunderstorms. Today, the 42-year-old has found a more efficient way to make money.

She leases her land to a cooperative that operates a large-scale farm, a departure from the family-run affairs of the past, and receives a fixed annual payment. This change has freed up much of her time, and she can take on part-time work like planting and harvesting goji berries in nearby villages and selling Xinjiang specialties online.

"With more sources, my income has multiplied and I have much more time than before. Life is getting better and better," she said.

Dilinur's story mirrors a larger transformation. With strategic policies and substantial investments in infrastructure, technology and social programs, Xinjiang has rapidly transformed from a remote border region into a lively economic hub, making tangible improvements in people's daily lives.

Decades of improvement

Over the seven decades since the establishment of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, living standards have improved remarkably with infrastructure investment, policy support and technological advancement. The average life expectancy of Xinjiang residents rose from just 30 years in 1949 to 77 years in 2024. Gross regional product surpassed 2 trillion yuan ($281 billion) in 2024, an increase of approximately 1,668 times since 1955.

XINHUA

The Urumqi International Land Port Area in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region on May 27, 2024

Incomes also show dramatic growth. The average annual urban disposable income was 42,820 yuan ($6,017), climbing up more than 130 times from 1978. Rural per-capita net income jumped more than 160 times to 19,427 yuan ($2,730) in the same period.

There are tangible improvements in people's everyday lives—better clothing, diverse and nutritious diets, modern housing and upgraded transportation.

Shi Huan, who lives in downtown Yining, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, is a beneficiary of the improvements. In the past, ferries were the only way for the city's residents to cross the Ili River, the region's mother river. For generations, the river—though a lifeline—was also a barrier, separating communities and limiting opportunities.

Today, that is a distant memory. The construction of eight bridges over the Ili River has revolutionized connectivity. The first bridge was completed in 1975, connecting its southern and northern banks. The most recent one, the 2.86-km bridge linking an industrial park in Yining and Qapqal Xibe Autonomous County, reduces travel time by more than half, unlocking new possibilities for trade, tourism and daily life.

For Shi, who runs a supermarket some 4 km from the bridge, it is more than a convenience—it's a symbol of progress. "I spent more than 30 minutes to commute from my home to the supermarket in the past," she said. "When the bridge opens, it will be only 15 minutes."

Shi called the bridges a testament to how much life has improved for the community. "Back in the day, you saw horse-drawn carts on the bridges,

XINHUA

Primary school students in Artux, Kizilsu Kirgiz Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang, pose for photographs after a gong and drum performance on September 12

hauling goods. Then came the minivans, and these days, you see more and more modern family cars on the road."

Xinjiang, accounting for one sixth of China's land area, is home to some of the country's most dramatic natural scenery—from the snow-capped Tianshan Mountain range and the vast Taklimakan Desert to serene alpine lakes, lush pastures and riverside poplar forests. Thanks to substantial improvements in infrastructure, the region's tourism industry is now flourishing.

Ili today gets a growing number of visitors from across the country and neighboring regions such as Kazakhstan, drawn to the area's stunning natural landscapes, rich cultural diversity and deep historical connections to the ancient Silk Road.

The Xinjiang regional government announced in May that it will undertake 500 key projects with a total investment of 3.47 trillion yuan ($487 billion) this year. The projects are distributed across major sectors: building integrated transportation networks, improving water resource efficiency, upgrading power grids, expanding oil and gas pipelines, and enhancing intelligent computing capacity.

Additionally, several projects in science and technology, education, culture, tourism, health and sports will be undertaken to advance social development and public services.

Increasing openness

A vast region that has the longest border and most land ports in China, Xinjiang has enhanced its connectivity with the outside world in recent years, boosting mutually beneficial cooperation and people-to-people exchange.

It saw over 16,400 China-Europe freight trains, launched under the Belt and Road Initiative, pass through in 2024. The initiative is a China-proposed framework that boosts connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes.

This was a 14-percent increase from the previous year, and more than half of the national total. The railway enables faster and more cost-effective movement of goods such as electronics, machinery, automotive parts and textiles from China to European markets and countries along the routes. The trains bring back food products, luxury items and industrial equipment. This has strengthened economic ties and supported regional growth.

The number of enterprises in the China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone (FTZ), inaugurated in November 2023, is also rapidly increasing. The first FTZ in China's northwestern border regions and the 22nd nationwide, it is now home to more than 40,000 enterprises. The number of foreign-invested enterprises is now 1.5 times more than when the FTZ opened, according to statistics from the regional department of commerce.

Despite global uncertainties, Xinjiang's foreign trade has maintained rapid growth, reaping 27.3-percent year-on-year growth in the first seven months of this year, according to Urumqi Customs. During the same period, Xinjiang conducted trade with 223 countries and regions worldwide, a year-on-year increase of 8.3 percent. Trade with Belt and Road partner countries grew by 17.5 percent year on year, accounting for 85.3 percent of Xinjiang's total foreign trade volume. **BR**

(Reporting from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region)

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COVER STORY

WALKING XINJIANG INTO WORDS

Renowned nonfiction writer treks deserts and mountains to capture seven decades of Xinjiang's development in upcoming book By Li Nan

At 69, many writers will choose to slow down. But that does not apply to He Jianming, one of China's most renowned nonfiction authors. Even after stepping down as vice chairman of the China Writers Association, he continues to produce 4,000 to 5,000 words a day—a rhythm he has maintained for decades.

For him, the act of writing is a kind of "joyful pain." The pain comes from the overwhelming number of stories he feels compelled to narrate; the joy from witnessing China's transformations, which are too important to leave untold.

For half a century, He has been a leading voice in reportage literature, a form of narrative nonfiction rooted in fieldwork and firsthand testimony. His career spans more than 60 books, with honors such as China's Lifetime Achievement Award for Reportage Literature and the distinction of being the first Chinese writer to win Russia's National Book Award. In 2019, he became the first Chinese nonfiction author nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Now, at an age when most writers look back, He is looking ahead—to Xinjiang.

A land transformed

He has visited Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region 11 times, each trip deepening his sense of wonder. Between July 2024 and August 2025, He traveled to the region five times, spending 78 days in the field and speaking with nearly 300 locals in different cities. His notebooks filled quickly with details of new projects in the Kashgar Area of the China (Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone, the Tarim River Basin, one of the driest and remotest areas in the world, desertification efforts along the Taklimakan, China's largest desert occupying much of the basin, and the construction of an ecological corridor.

"The Taklimakan Desert has been encircled with plants. Thousands of hectares of desert have been turned into arable land in just two years," he told *Beijing Review*. The speed of the change still amazes him.

As of November 2024, a green barrier more than 3,000 km long had encircled the Taklimakan, becoming the world's longest desert-edge defense system. In addition, an ecological corridor nearly 450 km long has been established along the Luntai-Minfeng Highway that cuts across the Taklimakan from north to south, stabilizing dunes and improving the local microclimate.

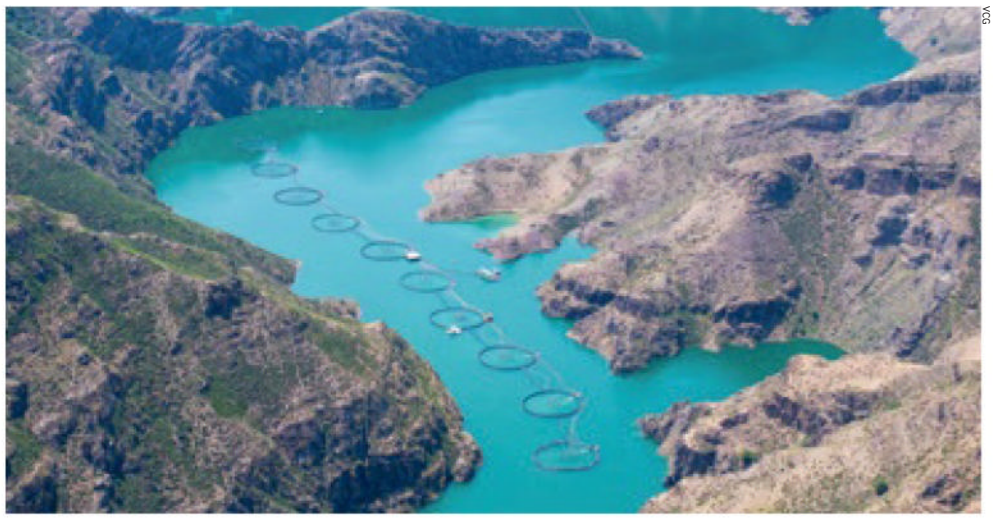
The regional government encourages residents to fight desertification by engaging them to manage the desert. "Managing 1 hectare of desert land alone can bring in 15,000 yuan ($2,100) a year; if a farmer manages 6 hectares, that's a decent income," He said.

Xinjiang's green miracles are not limited to deserts. He remembers standing by alpine lakes where salmon swam alongside crabs and even Australian crayfish. Such an improbable scene, he said, was made possible through national preferential policies, financial support and the hard work of the Xinjiang people.

"Capturing seven decades of Xinjiang's development in a single book is an enormous challenge," he said. He has already finished the manuscript. Out in late September, *A Poetic*

FAN GONGSHEN

He Jianming (left) interviews two embroiderers in Daoxiang Village in Hotan County, Hotan Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on February 26



A salmon farm on a river in Nilka County, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang, on June 9

Land: A Xinjiang Chronicle in Three Parts is his second book about the region.

In 2022, He crossed Tacheng Prefecture in north Xinjiang, visiting four counties and three cities. He gathered stories of Uygurs, Hans, Kazaks and other ethnic groups building better lives together, and of ordinary people protecting China's vast borderlands. From these materials came his first book on Xinjiang—*Pomegranates Blossom*.

The book takes Xinjiang's pomegranate—whose seeds are sweet, abundant and tightly clustered—as its central image. Each seed symbolizes one life, and together they embody ethnic unity. In 2024, the English translation of the book was named as one of the year's "internationally influential translations" by the China Publications Going Global program under the China Publication and Promotion Association.

"If *Pomegranates Blossom* is a small diamond, then *A Poetic Land: A Xinjiang Chronicle in Three Parts* is a mountain of gold," he said. And he has still more to write about: "I probably have at least three more years of Xinjiang writing ahead of me. Because besides what I've finished, I've gathered so much more."

The making of a writer

Born in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province in east China, He began his literary journey due to a stroke of luck. At the age of 8, he found a tattered, coverless book on a relative's desk and devoured it without knowing the title. Months later, he discovered it was *How the Steel Was Tempered* by Soviet writer Nikolai Ostrovsky (1904-36). The story of Pavel Korchagin, based on Ostrovsky himself, who overcomes immense hardships to become as resilient as steel, left a permanent mark on He's mind.

In high school, He's essays won first place across Suzhou. Later, he joined the army in 1976, where his gift for words took him to the newsroom as a military reporter. In 1978, he published his first nonfiction novella *Adventures in Western Hunan* and his path as a professional writer unfolded.

"The charm of reportage lies in reflecting China truthfully, but also artistically," He said. To him, the essence of nonfiction is being close to real people, real life. On his most recent Xinjiang trip in March, he traveled 6,000 km in eight days. His days were spent interviewing people, his nights on the road. More than once, he reached an interviewee's home at midnight.

The journeys were not without mishaps. He suffers from high blood pressure, and on one expedition his vehicle got stuck in the Gobi Desert. It left him with a splitting headache and breathing difficulties. But such ordeals, he said, are worth it. "Getting firsthand material is the mission of a nonfiction writer."

Unlike many contemporaries, He rarely relies on recorders. He prefers handwritten notes and memory. "My notebooks are just a fraction of what I remember. The most important things stay naturally in my mind, and they return when the moment demands it," He said.

While he is honored at home, his 2019 Nobel nomination signaled growing recognition of Chinese nonfiction abroad. But he remains grounded in a simple principle: "A good work must first move the writer, then countrymen and then the world."

Chinese writers, he insists, have a duty to tell China's stories with honesty and depth. "When I share Xinjiang's stories, even readers in China are often stunned. That is my responsibility, my mission," he said.

Facing AI

He is often asked about AI these days. His view is blunt, "AI already surpasses 80 percent of ordinary writers," he said. "Type in a few keywords, and in seconds it produces a fine poem or essay."

But he also noted its limits. "AI writing about Xinjiang will only be superficial. It cannot accumulate lived experience or speak with the voice of someone who has been there."

For him, the antidote lies in individuality. "Literature and art must remain personal and unique. That is how we withstand AI's impact."

In an era when algorithms can churn out passable prose in seconds, he continues to write the old-fashioned way: Traveling, observing, listening and recording with pen and memory. He still walks through deserts and mountain passes in Xinjiang to witness change firsthand.

This persistence is not nostalgia. It is conviction. For him, truly moving words cannot be generated by code—they must come from lived experience, from the pulse and breath of real life. And so he keeps writing—recording Xinjiang, and China, with his steps, his pen and his life. **BR**

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CHINA MOSAIC

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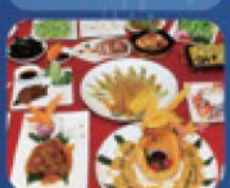

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Western Recognition of Palestine: Significance & Stances

By Carlos Martinez

In late September, a number of Western countries including Britain, Canada, Australia, France, Portugal, Luxembourg, Malta and Monaco announced their formal recognition of the State of Palestine.

This follows similar announcements by Ireland, Norway and Spain last year, meaning that 157 out of 193 United Nations member states now recognize Palestinian statehood, which was originally declared by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1988.

That these Western countries, longstanding supporters of Israel, have finally chosen to extend formal recognition to Palestine is a significant development, and reflects the growing international revulsion at Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza, which has to date resulted in the deaths of at least 65,000 people, the majority of them women and children.

Gaza's infrastructure has been systematically destroyed, with hospitals, schools, water and power supplies deliberately targeted. A new report by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory has found that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza. The report continues: "It is clear that there is an intent to destroy the Palestinians in Gaza through acts that meet the criteria set forth in the Genocide Convention."

International bodies have also confirmed that Israel is deliberately obstructing the entry of food into Gaza and that, as a result, there is an ongoing famine in the territory.

The horrors of this war have shocked public opinion around the world, leading to a powerful global mass solidarity movement which has become too big to ignore. This has prompted governments in the West to reconsider their position on Palestinian statehood.

Significance

Palestinian Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Husam Zomlot, celebrated the announcement of Britain's recognition, and pointed to its historical significance given Britain's role in the creation of the state of Israel and the dispossession of the Palestinian people: "In the same capital of the Balfour Declaration, after more than a century of ongoing denial, dispossession and erasure, the UK Government has finally taken the long overdue step of recognizing the state of Palestine."

Prominent Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, best known for his 2006 book *The Ethnic Cleaning of Palestine*, commented that recognition of a Palestinian state "has symbolic significance as a counter-movement to the present Israeli strategy of eliminating Palestine as a people, as a nation, as a country, and as a history," adding: "Any kind of reference—even symbolic—to Palestine as an existing entity right now is a blessing," as it "prevents Palestine from disappearing from the global and regional conversation."

Washington isolated

The move by Britain, France, Canada and other Western countries leaves the U.S. increasingly isolated, as the only permanent member of the UN Security Council to oppose Palestinian statehood.

Such is the Trump administration's hatred of Palestine that it attempted to block President Mahmoud Abbas from attending key UN meetings in New York City by denying visas to him

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Palestinians celebrate with Palestinian flags during a rally in the West Bank city of Hebron on September 23. Rallies were held in several cities across the West Bank on that day to celebrate the Western recognition of the State of Palestine and to show solidarity with the people of the Gaza Strip

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Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addresses the annual meeting of world leaders at the United Nations headquarters in New York City on September 22 by video. The U.S. denied a visa to Abbas for the UN General Assembly in August

and his team. In the end, a majority of countries voted to allow him to address the session online.

Given that the U.S.' allies have tended to dutifully follow the foreign policy script written for them in Washington, D.C., it is noteworthy—and welcome—that Canada and the countries of Western Europe are exercising a level of strategic autonomy on this issue. It also highlights that, from a global governance point of view, the U.S. is becoming firmly established in people's minds as an outlier and destabilizing force in international affairs.

It is to be hoped that these Western countries recognizing Palestine will now place pressure on the U.S., such that meaningful progress can be made at a Security Council level.

China and Palestine

China announced its recognition of the State of Palestine on November 20, 1988, becoming one of the first countries to do so.

From the beginning of the current war, China has called for an immediate, comprehensive and unconditional ceasefire and withdrawal, as well as demanding a resumption of humanitarian aid.

It has urged all parties to negotiate in good faith, and has consistently pointed out that the root cause of the conflict is Israel's persistent denial of Palestinian national rights.

In February 2024, Ma Xinmin, Legal Adviser to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, made legal representations at the International Court of Justice, upholding the right of the Palestinian people to armed resistance against colonial occupation.

A few months later, hosted by China, representatives of 14 Palestinian factions (including Hamas, Fatah and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) met in Beijing to end Palestinian national division. Witnessing the signing of the Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity on July 23, 2024, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi remarked that only when Palestinian factions speak as one can the voice of justice be loud and clear, and only when they join hands and march forward shoulder to shoulder can they succeed in their national liberation cause.

Moving forward

The vastly differing approaches of the U.S. and China to the Palestinian question—as well as to the Ukraine war, the Iran nuclear issue, the climate crisis and many other urgent global challenges—highlight a growing divergence in international affairs. China is increasingly seen as a force for peace, progress, stability and good governance, while the U.S. is widely perceived as a force for war, hegemonism, chaos and unilateralism.

While wider recognition of Palestinian statehood represents a victory for Palestinians, it is a largely symbolic step. Gaza is experiencing the worst humanitarian crisis of the 21st century. Illegal settlements are expanding in the West Bank. Self-determination and national rights for Palestinians are still far from being realized.

The peoples of the world must continue to mobilize to demand an immediate ceasefire, an immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops, an end to the siege, a resumption of full humanitarian aid, and the earliest possible UN-level dialogue toward a just and lasting peace and the realization of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people. **BR**

The author is an activist, writer and independent political commentator based in London. He is also author of *The End of the Beginning: Lessons of the Soviet Collapse* (2019) and *The East Is Still Red: Chinese Socialism in the 21st Century* (2023)
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Pragmatic & Positive: Beyond Grand Narratives

By Liang Xiao

On the evening of September 19, Chinese President Xi Jinping held phone talks with U.S. President Donald Trump for nearly two hours. It was their second direct dialogue since June 5, and Beijing characterized the call as "pragmatic, positive and constructive."

Compared with earlier phone calls between the Chinese and U.S. leaders, this conversation seemed more focused on specifics, such as China's massive military parade on September 3 to mark the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. Recalling China and the U.S. had stood as allies in World War II, President Xi said the Chinese people will not forget the valuable support from the U.S. and other anti-fascist Allied nations in the war of resistance against Japanese aggression. Honoring fallen heroes and remembering history is essential for cherishing peace and creating a better future, he added.

Trump said China's recent parade was "phenomenal and beautiful." He emphasized that U.S.-China ties constitute the most important bilateral relationship in the world, noting that cooperation between the two nations can accomplish many major initiatives that contribute to global peace and stability. He further affirmed that Washington seeks to foster a long-term and constructive partnership with Beijing. "The U.S. will work with China for world peace."

Another focal point of global attention was the two leaders' renewed discussion regarding TikTok. Since 2019, the app has been a recurring flashpoint in bilateral trade negotiations. Citing "national security" grounds, Washington has sought to bring the platform—developed by China's ByteDance and used by 170 million users in the U.S.—under its control.

At its core, the TikTok dispute reflects Washington's attempt to exert maximum pressure on Beijing, seeking concessions on issues such as core algorithms, export controls and industrial policy—echoing earlier cases in which the U.S. cracked down on Japan's Toshiba and France's Alstom. What is different now is that China is a counterpart unwilling to bow to pressure. Beijing maintains that the essence of China-U.S. economic and trade relations is mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, underpinned by broad opportunities and shared interests. At the same time, China has made clear it will not pursue any agreement at the expense of its principles, the interests of its enterprises or international fairness and justice.

Beijing respects the wishes of enterprises and encourages them to pursue business negotiations on the basis of market principles

Regarding TikTok, China rejects the U.S. practice of politicizing commercial and technological matters. U.S. regulatory actions to date have rested largely on sweeping claims of national security, without any detailed evaluation of the platform's operations or sufficient space for dialogue with Chinese companies. Beijing maintains that corporate matters should be resolved through market rules rather than political coercion. A key outcome of the China-U.S. trade talks in Madrid in mid-September was the two sides' first agreement on a basic framework to "properly resolve the TikTok issue through cooperation."

Xi stressed that China's position on TikTok is clear: Beijing respects the wishes of enterprises and encourages them to pursue business negotiations on the basis of market principles, seeking solutions that comply with Chinese laws and regulations while balancing interests. He expressed the hope that Washington will provide Chinese companies with an open, fair and non-discriminatory environment for investment in the U.S. Trump responded that the U.S. seeks to advance bilateral economic and trade cooperation and will support both sides' teams in consultations to properly address the TikTok issue.

Notably, within 48 hours of the presidential phone call, a U.S. congressional delegation headed by Adam Smith, ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, landed in Beijing. It was the first visit by a House delegation to China since 2019. During their stay, the delegation held separate meetings with senior Chinese officials, delivering a positive signal for the stabilization of bilateral ties.

At a press conference on September 23, Smith struck a pragmatic note. "I don't think it's necessary for both sides to be fully on the same page right now," he said. "What matters is that we're at least reading the same book, and that can serve as a starting point." **BR**

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Dialogue in an Age of Division

China's call for dialogue and peacekeeping as keys to lasting stability at the Xiangshan forum By Zhao Wei

"No other conference in the world can do this: It brings together people from Ukraine, representatives of NATO, and even voices from Russia, all on the same panel, talking to one another. It is fantastic of the Xiangshan Forum!" Jean Christophe Iseux von Pfetten, President of the Royal Institute for East-West Strategic Studies in Britain, said. Speaking in Chinese at the 12th Beijing Xiangshan Forum in Beijing on September 18, his words carried the weight of his emotion.

The annual Beijing Xiangshan Forum is China's top security and defense conference, aiming at providing an equal, inclusive and diverse platform for participants to engage in constructive dialogues and build consensus and trust. Over three days from September 17, more than 1,800 participants from over 100 countries and organizations gathered under the forum's theme of Upholding International Order and Promoting Peaceful Development. The conversations were open, at times tense, yet underscored something simple and profound: In a fractured world, talking itself becomes an act of peace.

Echoes from history

Eighty years have passed since the victory in the World Anti-Fascist War. But the echoes of that history still shape today's debates. At the forum, the questions came quickly: How should the world remember the war? How can the world's post-war order continue to evolve?

On the event's opening day, these questions sparked spirited exchange as the speakers clashed, reflected and searched for common ground. Among them was Harold E. Raugh Jr., President of the International Commission of Military History, a global organization dedicated to advancing research and education in the field. He reminded delegates that China's wartime role remains gravely under-recognized in the West.

China was the main theater in the East of the World Anti-Fascist War. Over the course of 14 years of the war of resistance against Japanese aggression, from 1931 to 1945, China tied down more than two thirds of the Japanese Army, at the cost of more than 35 million casualties. "That sacrifice is seldom reflected in Western textbooks," Raugh Jr. said.

Chinese historians shared similar views. Hu Dekun, Honorary President of the Chinese Association of Second World War History, pointed out that many global accounts date World War II (WWII) from Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, erasing the eight years China had already been fighting at that point. "China was the true main Eastern theater of the World Anti-Fascist War," Hu said.

The neglect, according to Raugh, was not just about language barriers or academic oversight but about narrative dominance. He stressed that Western countries monopolized the writing of history after 1945.

For Chinese participants, remembrance was not about dwelling on victimhood but about sustaining vigilance. "The lesson of WWII is that great powers must coexist peacefully," said Meng Xiangqing, a military affairs expert. "The trend of peaceful development and cooperation is irresistible."

The commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War, including a military parade, in Beijing on September 3, attended by 26 heads of state and government, was framed in this spirit. "It was not about showing muscle, but about showing responsibility," said Zheng Yongnian, a professor of international relations at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen).

Yan Xuetong, Dean of the Institute of International Relations at Beijing-based Tsinghua University, said the September 3 event sent a clear message: More and more countries are willing to engage in security and strategic cooperation with China.

Between rivalry and restraint

If history offers sobering lessons, present realities call for deeper reflection. Speaking at a September 17 session titled The Right Way for Major Countries to Get Along, held before the forum's opening, Chad Sbragia, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for China in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, pointed to a recent phone call between Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun and U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

During that September 9 phone conversation, Hegseth assured that the U.S. "does not seek conflict with China, nor regime change or strangulation of the PRC (People's Republic of China)." Sbragia described the remarks as "unprecedented," suggesting they signaled a "significant shift in U.S. policy."

Wu Xinbo, Director of Shanghai-based Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, offered a cooler appraisal. He insisted that it is not what the U.S. says, but what it does, that matters. Despite rhetorical reassurances, the U.S. Government "still very much focuses on the Asia-Pacific, with China as a target, and is trying to mobilize its allies in this region to join the U.S. in deterring China particularly in the Taiwan Straits." For Wu, the key to peaceful coexistence is simple: Respect sovereignty and equality.

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The 12th Beijing Xiangshan Forum opens in Beijing on September 18

"First in trade and economic relations, and then expand this to diplomatic and even security relations so that we can have a broader understanding about where this relationship is heading and what progress we can make realistically in each area," Wu said.

When asked about the bipartisan U.S. congressional delegation set to arrive in China a few days later, Sbragia admitted the visit would have been difficult to imagine not long ago. "I don't think anybody would have anticipated that the House Armed Services Committee would be interested to come here," he said. "But I think that reflects the changing dynamics of the strategic environment itself. My suspicions are that they want to better understand where we're at in terms of the overarching relationship, but specifically with the security relationship."

The U.S. delegation was led by Representative Adam Smith, ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee. On September 21, Chinese Premier Li Qiang received Smith and his colleagues at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. During the meeting, Li noted that as China and the United States are major countries with significant global influence, maintaining stable, sound and sustainable development of bilateral relations serves the common interests of both sides and meets the expectations of the international community.

Building peace beyond rhetoric

If dialogue is the foundation of peace, then peacekeeping is its practice. The forum looked ahead with this in mind, taking international peacekeeping as one of its focuses. For 35 years, China has been one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping operations. Since dispatching five military observers in 1990, it has taken part in 26 missions, sending over 50,000 personnel to more than 20 countries and regions. Seventeen Chinese peacekeepers have lost their lives whilst on active duty.

Senior Colonel Gong Guoxi, Deputy Director of the Peacekeeping Affairs Center of China's Ministry of National Defense, called this record "a key force in global stability" at the forum. He detailed how Chinese contingents, engineers, doctors and infantry support both security and development.

Major Dai Tingyu from China participated in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, one of the United Nations' most challenging peacekeeping missions, as medical personnel in 2021-22. What she shared at the forum brought statistics to life. In a single year, she organized 83 casualty evacuations, 30 emergency medical escorts and nine body repatriations. "On average, there was one escort every two days," she said on September 17. Beyond battlefield medicine, her team offered acupuncture and cupping therapy to colleagues from other nations, blending relief with cultural exchange.

China's support "enables vital operations in some of the world's most difficult theaters," Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under Secretary General for Peace Operations of the UN, said at the session.

Such contributions reflect China's broader approach: Stand for fairness and justice, firmly opposing hegemony, power politics and the attempts of a few to dictate the destiny of others or monopolize development opportunities.

As Dong underscored in his keynote at the forum's opening, building military relations rooted in peace, friendship, stability and mutual trust is an essential safeguard for global security. By contrast, he warned, military alliances and bloc politics, small circles that serve hegemonic interests, manufacture enemies, foster division and export confrontation, must be approached with vigilance and firmly opposed.

China, he stressed, remains committed to nonalignment, extending its hand in friendship widely and working to build new forms of security partnerships through unity and cooperation to address risks together.

"In an era full of challenges, cooperation is our best choice, and the only path to lasting peace," Dong concluded. **BR**

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
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Ready to Go Rural

How farming, processing and sports are revitalizing a rural community By Ji Jing

The autumn sun bathes Dahuchenjia Village in Zhaoyuan, a county-level city in Yantai City, Shandong Province, in a golden glow, transforming its rolling hills covered with vast vineyards into a glittering panorama. As grape harvesting season arrives, the air becomes thick with the sweet scent of ripe fruit.

The village served as the main venue for activities celebrating the eighth Chinese Farmers' Harvest Festival, which fell on September 23. The festival, established in 2018 and observed annually on the Autumn Equinox, stands as China's first national holiday dedicated to farmers.

This year's festivities were particularly lively, featuring 58 key activities nationwide. Dahuchenjia hosted 12 of these, including a celebratory gala and an exhibition highlighting the remarkable achievements in consolidating poverty alleviation efforts and advancing rural revitalization. Rural revitalization, a strategy introduced at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2017, fosters the overall development of China's rural areas. It builds upon the success of the nationwide poverty alleviation campaign, which had eradicated absolute poverty as of late 2020.

Appointing Dahuchenjia as the main venue for the eighth Chinese Farmers' Harvest Festival celebration is a testament to Yantai's standing as an agricultural powerhouse. Yantai has abundant agricultural resources and serves as a crucial hub for the production, processing and export of agricultural products.

Large-scale farming

Yantai Mayor Zhang Mingkang painted a vivid picture of the city's modern agriculture, characterized by the four colors of "red, purple, blue and gold."At a press conference held by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs on August 29, he explained that "red" represents apples and cherries, with sprawling orchards transforming mountains and plains into scenes of abundant harvest. "Purple" represents the flourishing wine industry, with Yantai recognized as an international wine city and home to world-renowned wineries like Changyu. "Blue" embodies the vibrant marine economy, as Yantai has 1.16 million square km of sea area and leads the country in the number of national-level marine ranches. Finally, "gold" highlights the robust grain industry, where corn, wheat, and other crops consistently achieve high yields.

Dahuchenjia itself boasts a robust agricultural sector, a stark contrast to its past. Merely a few decades ago, Dahuchenjia was a village at the mercy of the elements, where harvests of crops like corn, peanuts and sweet potatoes were entirely dictated by the weather.

A pivotal shift began in 2016, when the village began to leverage its farmers' cooperative to optimize land resources and develop modern agriculture. Farmers' cooperatives are mutual-aid economic organizations established and managed by farmers. The cooperatives serve their members by providing services such as the purchase of agricultural production materials, sales, processing, transportation and storage of agricultural products, as well as technical and information services related to agricultural production and management.

Wang Zhaoling, a staff member with the village cooperative, explained to *Qilu Evening News* newspaper how the farmers' cooperative works. "Land

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A ceremony celebrates the eighth Chinese Farmers' Harvest Festival in Zhaoyuan, Yantai City, Shandong Province, on September 23

use rights were transferred from individual farmers to establish a modern agricultural park. The park's profit was then divided and distributed back to farmers," Wang said.

Today, Dahuchenjia is home to an 833-hectare modern agricultural park, dedicated to the large-scale cultivation of agricultural products. Notable among these are apples and Sunshine Rose grapes—a grape variety known for its large size, crisp texture, intense sweetness and potent aroma. The park yields over 18,000 tons of agricultural products annually, including grapes and apples, and all products are marketed under the unified Dahu Manor trademark.

Liu Xufeng and her husband Yang Changhui were pioneers in adopting the large-scale grape cultivation within the farmers' cooperative, where professional management and unified pest and disease control are carried out.

Yang told Xinhua News Agency that the cooperative put in place necessary infrastructure, including grape trellises and irrigation systems, while they focus on grape cultivation. As of late 2018, the one hectare of grapes under their care had generated a profit of 300,000 to 400,000 yuan ($42,159 to $56,212). The cooperative has boosted local income in general. In 2024, the per-capita disposable income of villagers reached 37,000 yuan ($5,200), exceeding the national rural average of 23,119 yuan ($3,249).

To mitigate market risks associated with large-scale cultivation, Dahuchenjia has actively developed agricultural processing, in turn boosting sales and enhancing the added value of its agricultural products.

Within the Dahu Manor Winery, Sunshine Rose grapes undergo a process of pressing, distillation, brewing and bottling to be transformed into exquisite wine.

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A parade showcases newly harvested agricultural products in Huangling Village, Wuyuan County, Jiangxi Province, on September 23

Yao Yunping, General Manager of Dahu Manor Winery, told Xinhua that the winery's annual sales have surpassed 1 million yuan ($140,531). Moreover, the winery is among the pioneering enterprises in China to produce distilled spirits from Sunshine Rose grapes.

Further diversifying its processing capabilities, the village has also established a fruit canning production line with an annual capacity of 11,000 tons, alongside a production line for fruit beverages and fruit wines, capable of producing 500 tons annually.

Rural tourism

Beyond its agricultural strengths, Dahuchenjia has recently focused on cultivating its tourism industry, integrating agriculture, tourism, and sports.

In July, the village hosted several Village Basketball Association (Cun BA) matches. Originating as a harvest celebration event in Taipan Village in Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Guizhou Province, the Cun BA has now blossomed into a nationwide competition.

Over seven days, 16 teams from 10 provinces and cities, including Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei, took to the court in 43 matches. Daily visitor numbers surged past 5,000, with local guesthouses experiencing full occupancy. These popular sporting events have injected new vitality into the rural community.

This success is not a one-off accident. Wang Hanlin, Assistant to Secretary of the CPC Dahuchenjia Branch, told *Qilu Evening News* that Dahuchenjia has hosted multiple national- and provincial-level competitions in recent years.

Yang told Xinhua that during July's Cun BA games, several grape varieties were ripe for harvesting. The competition resulted in a one-third increase in his grape sales compared to previous years, and he has also gained many new customers.

The successful practices of Dahuchenjia provide a replicable model for rural revitalization. Its approach has been widely promoted across Yantai and even Shandong at large. **BR**

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Science Takes Center Stage

National Science Popularization Month brings cutting-edge tech and accessible learning to the public By Ji Jing

XINHUA

A child interacts with a robotic dog at a science museum in Xuzhou, Jiangsu Province, on September 7

Wang Yimei, a resident of Haikou, Hainan Province, drove two hours to Danzhou, another city in the province, so her child could take part in the 2025 Hainan Province National Science Popularization Month activities on September 6.

"Building race car and rocket models with the teacher, we were very excited to learn about the scientific principles behind them. We'll come again next time there's an event like this," Wang told *Hainan Daily* newspaper.

After the inaugural National Science Popularization Month in China started on September 1, Hainan launched an impressive 765 activities across the province, to spark public curiosity and boost scientific literacy.

The Danzhou event showcased cutting-edge technologies, including an AI chess robot, which was a highlight. "Who will win in a game of chess between humans and robots?" Curious visitors watched as students sat at the chessboard, challenging the robot one after another.

"This robot has mastered more than 1,000 chess strategies, allowing it to quickly find the optimal move," event staff member Zou Guansheng told *Hainan Daily*.

Nearby, a robotic drummer captivated audiences. After a song was selected, the robot got into action, wielding drumsticks with precise, stable and powerful rhythms, while children danced to the music.

"Relying on advanced algorithms, the robot has a 'super brain' capable of accurately analyzing musical scores and synchronizing movements of its head, hands and feet with precision. It can drum as fast as eight beats per second," another staff member said.

These novel technological experiences sparked visitor Zhang Wen's strong interest in technology. With AI integrated into all aspects of life and work, "only by continuously learning and keeping pace with technological development can we create more innovative achievements and make life better," she told *Hainan Daily*.

Science literacy

China has made significant strides in science popularization during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period. This has laid a solid foundation for building a high-quality, innovative talent pool and promoting high-level scientific and technological self-reliance.

"By 2024, the proportion of Chinese citizens possessing scientific literacy rose to 15.37 percent, a 4.81-percentage-point increase from 2020, demonstrating an accelerating improvement trend," Feng Shenhong, Deputy

Chairman of the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), said at a news conference in Beijing on September 4.

The National Action Plan for Scientific Literacy 2021-35, released by the State Council in June 2021, set the targets of making 15 percent of the country's population scientifically literate by 2025, and 25 percent by 2035. Scientific literacy is defined as having an understanding of scientific concepts and processes, as well as the ability to apply them in analyzing and solving real-life issues. It is an important part of a population's overall ability.

To further enhance scientific literacy, the amended Science and Technology Popularization Law, adopted and put into force in December 2024, designates September as National Science Popularization Month.

Ni Zhiyu, head of the CAST's Department of Science and Technology Popularization, said at the same press conference that the National Science Popularization Month expands upon the previous National Science Popularization Day observed annually for 22 years, first on June 29 and later on the third weekend of September. The new month-long initiative amplifies the importance of popularizing science. This year's National Science Popularization Month is themed "science transforms lives, innovation secures the future."

Making science more accessible

The activities organized during the National Science Popularization Month aimed to bring science and technology into people's daily lives, and innovative formats like science night markets are emerging, aiming to make science trendy.

In Shanghai, science meets urban culture at Sinan Mansions, a historic complex that has been transformed into a science popularization night market featuring light shows, magic and band performances.

Science popularization is also extending beyond cities to rural areas. In the rural area of Hechuan District in Chongqing Municipality, volunteers shared their knowledge of agricultural technology, fraud prevention and waste sorting with villagers. Preview activities prior to the 2025 National Science Popularization Month sparked aspirations in aerospace, AI and deep-sea exploration. "I never expected Chongqing to once have been an ocean!" exclaimed 6-year-old Guo Ziyi after attending a lecture on Chongqing's geological evolution. The event engaged children in their hometown's geological history through lectures and exhibitions of fossils and minerals.

XINHUA

Visitors examine a miniature robotic arm at a community exhibition in Shanghai during the National Science Popularization Month on September 13

University students have served as knowledge disseminators. In honor of the National Science Popularization Month, the Xiangya Little Dolphins Science and Technology Volunteer Service Team, comprised of medical students from Central South University in Changsha, Hunan Province, recently traveled to Yunnan Province to conduct engaging science outreach activities.

In Baoshan, the team took local primary school students on a visit to a coffee plantation. The children saw coffee tree varieties up close, experienced the process of grinding and brewing coffee firsthand and, guided by the team members, observed the plantation's environment. Through this multi-faceted approach, they discovered why Yunnan is a prime growing region for high-quality Arabica coffee beans—the world's most popular variety.

The coffee experience sparked numerous questions. "Why does drinking coffee make people feel more energetic?" "Are there other benefits of coffee for the human body? Can children drink coffee?" The medical student volunteers drew upon their expertise to explain the mechanism of caffeine's action and the effects of coffee on the human body in clear, comprehensible language.

The aim of the National Science Popularization Month is to assist in building a comprehensive and sustainable new ecosystem for science popularization and education nationwide. The ultimate goal is not merely the dissemination of knowledge, but an awakening of the spirit of science among the general public—allowing them to appreciate the beauty of science and be better able to apply it in their life, study and work. **BR**

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Integration and Innovation

Qingdao's growing role as a melting pot for culture, education and scientific collaboration

By Yuan Yuan

When discussing cross-cultural communication, Frances Owen, an American teacher at Ocean University of China, referenced the book *The Hero's Journey*. "Everyone who embarks on a cross-cultural journey is a hero in their own right," she told *Beijing Review*.

Back in 1998, when Owen decided to leave the U.S. for China alone, her motivation was simple: As the youngest child in her family, she had always been well-protected, and this time, she wanted to prove to herself that she could take on a significant challenge—building a life and career in China.

At the time, almost everyone around her thought she was crazy. "They told me I didn't speak Chinese, wouldn't be able to adjust to the food, didn't know a single Chinese person and would never last," she said.

Where the heart is

Owen initially chose to teach in Yantai, Shandong Province in east China, rather than Beijing or Shanghai because she genuinely wanted to experience how ordinary Chinese people lived outside major metropolitan areas. Her early days in Yantai were indeed tough: She spoke no Chinese but was eager to communicate with people; she struggled with vastly different lifestyle habits and often cried herself to sleep at night.

What helped her persevere through those difficult times and ultimately decide to stay were the Chinese friends she met. They warmly offered help, patiently introduced her to Chinese culture; and through their kindness, she developed a deep connection with China. She found close Chinese friends she could confide in and became like family to three Chinese households.

After leaving Yantai, Owen worked in Dalian, Liaoning Province, northeast China, and Shanghai. She taught at Dalian Maritime University and later worked as a trainer in Shanghai, guiding foreign teachers who had newly arrived in China. Her journey in China has always followed the coastline. "My mother loves the ocean," she said. "I grew up by the sea in California, and in China I also chose coastal cities—it feels like I've maintained a certain connection with my family this way."

Now settled in Qingdao, she feels more at home there than in any previous city. "It's hard to describe—it's more like an inner certainty. No matter where I go, when I return to Qingdao, I truly feel I'm home," she said. Through self-study, she has become fluent in Chinese and plans to live in China long term.

She has developed a growing love for traditional Chinese clothing and some other aspects of the culture. A minor frustration is that she is still often mistaken for a tourist. "Many foreigners who have lived long term in China wish to be seen as part of the community here, not as 'outsiders.' I may look Western, but inside, I already have a Chinese heart."

Home away from home

Like Owen, Professor Franz Gadermann at Qingdao University of Science and Technology (QUST) also moved to China over two decades ago. Now 68,

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Professor Franz Gadermann presents the biography of German Sinologist Richard Wilhelm at a forum in Qingdao University of Science and Technology, in Qingdao City, Shandong Province, on September 5

COURTESY PHOTO

Professor Naser Golsanami conducts research in a laboratory at Shandong University of Science and Technology in Qingdao, Shandong, in November 2024

Gadermann has taught at the Sino-German Technical College of the university for 24 years. The college, established in 2001, is a higher education project under the educational cooperation framework between the Chinese and German governments.

When the college was founded, Gadermann, then a senior German language expert at Paderborn University in Germany, relocated to China to contribute to its development. Prior to this, he had taught at Paderborn University for over 20 years and had long harbored a dream of teaching abroad. Seizing the opportunity when QUST was recruiting German teachers, he and his family arrived in Qingdao in 2001, where they have remained ever since.

Five years ago, his son, Anouar Gadermann, also joined the Sino-German Technical College, teaching alongside his father. Fluent in Chinese, Anouar Gadermann often interprets for his father. "My grandfather and parents were all teachers. Growing up in that environment inspired me, and I'm honored to have become a teacher myself—and finally, a colleague of my father's," he said.

Franz Gadermann has authored a book *Mein Qingdao* (*My Qingdao*), documenting his experiences and reflections on teaching and living in China since 2001. The manuscript is currently under review by a publisher. "I hope this book can convey Sino-German friendship and show more young Germans the real China," he said.

A decade-long bond

Also living in Qingdao is Professor Naser Golsanami from Iran, now at Shandong University of Science and Technology (SDUST), who first arrived in 2014 as part of a major historic opportunity, created by a Belt and Road Initiative cooperation project. He pursued his Ph.D. at China University of Petroleum (East China) and began teaching at SDUST in 2019. Currently, he serves as a professor at the Key Laboratory of Mine Disaster Prevention and Control and the College of Energy and Mining Engineering.

In Golsanami's view, Qingdao is not only a famous coastal city but also a thriving hub for technological innovation and exchange. "If your impression of Qingdao is still only sunshine, beaches and seafood, it might be time for an update. The city's rapid development in sci-tech innovation has given it a new identity—one that resonates not just across China, but throughout member states of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," he remarked on September 4 after attending the launch ceremony of the China-SCO Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Center in Qingdao.

As a significant outcome of the SCO Tianjin Summit 2025, which was held on August 31-September 1, the center in Qingdao aims to serve as a key hub for scientific cooperation among SCO member states, focusing on enhancing exchange, advancing joint research and development, improving technology transfer services, and establishing an international think tank for policy support.

Golsanami said he believes that the establishment of the center is a result of long-term and steadfast support for technological innovation by both Shandong and Qingdao, as well as the remarkable achievements already made in this field. He himself is both a witness to and an active participant in international scientific cooperation in this dynamic environment.

Golsanami, as an expert in geological resources and geological engineering, has published over 60 papers in high-level journals and has led or participated in seven research projects. He particularly highlighted how China's commitment to technological innovation is reflected in its policy, such as the new K-visa scheduled to be launched on October 1, designed specifically for young scientific talent. This visa offers greater convenience in terms of number of entries, validity period and duration of stay—a move that, in his words, "demonstrates China's sincerity and efficiency in attracting international talent."

Golsanami continues to focus on scientific exchange and cooperation. "As a core SCO city, Qingdao is poised to become a vital hub for enhancing collaboration and accelerating the transformation of scientific achievements among member states," he said. **BR**

(*Reporting from Qingdao, Shandong Province*)

Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to yuanyuan@cicgamericas.com

Focused, Futuristic and Flourishing

Fujian's businesses are thriving through hi-tech upgrading By Pan Xiaoqiao

CATL, or Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd., began its life in 2011 as an obscure power battery startup facing multiple technological bottlenecks and fierce competition. Today, it produces a third of the world's electric car batteries and supplies 16 of the world's biggest carmakers, including General Motors, the Shanghai factory of Tesla, BMW, Toyota and Volkswagen.

Headquartered in Ningde in the northeast of Fujian Province, CATL has operations covering the entire electric car battery production chain, from materials to finished products. Its breakthroughs in high energy density, ultra-fast charging and battery stability have greatly reduced consumers' concerns about electric vehicle (EV) range, charging times and safety; and accelerated the pace of global electrification.

The company has taken the economic output of Ningde to new levels. Only a decade ago, Ningde's GDP was the lowest in the province; but in the first half of 2025, its GDP hit 193 billion yuan ($28 billion), ranking the fifth out of Fujian's nine cities.

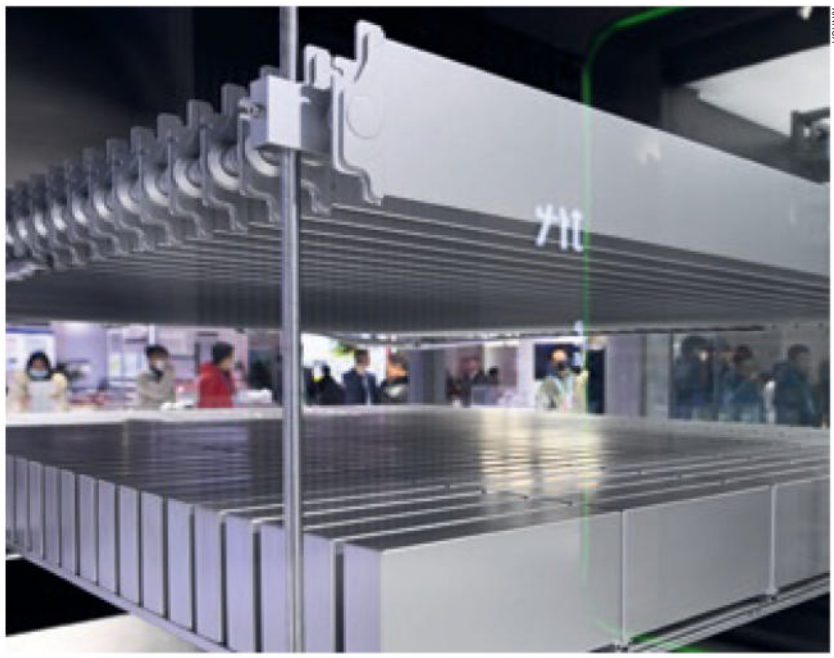
In search of excellence

CATL has continuously innovated its cutting-edge battery products and technologies in recent years, breaking many of its own previous records. So far, the company has more than 40,000 patents granted or pending.

Batteries constitute at least a third of the production cost of an EV, making CATL a critical partner in the EV supply chain in China and beyond. According to rechargeable battery and EV research firm SNE Research, in 2024, CATL accounted for 37.9 percent of the global market in power battery usage and 36.5 percent in the global energy storage battery market. Lithium-ion batteries are divided into consumer batteries, used in consumer electronics; power batteries, used in vehicles and power tools; and energy storage batteries used in energy supply or to power facilities. As of this June,

XINHUA

The super batteries of Contemporary Amperex Technology Co. Ltd. (CATL) on display at the Third China International Supply Chain Expo in Beijing on July 19


XINHUA

High-density Kirin batteries manufactured by CATL, in Ningde City, Fujian Province, on December 1, 2023

the company's batteries had powered more than 20.43 million vehicles in 66 countries and regions worldwide.

In addition, the company also supplies grid energy storage systems to domestic and overseas markets. On January 17, Emirati renewable energy company Masdar announced CATL is the preferred provider of battery energy storage systems for the world's first giga-scale "round-the-clock" photovoltaic energy storage project, set to be built in Abu Dhabi.

In 2022, CATL launched its third-generation cell-to-pack (CTP) battery technology, known as Kirin or Qilin. Compared with traditional batteries, CTP batteries are easier, faster and cheaper to produce and enable an EV to travel up to 1,000 km on a single charge.

In July 2024, CATL launched two products for the logistics and distribution industry, the superfast charging edition and long-range edition of the CATL Tianxing light commercial vehicle battery. One adds 200 km of range in just 10 minutes and the other delivers a full-charge range that meets a day's long-haul delivery needs.

In April, the company unveiled a battery that will provide a driving range of 520 km with five minutes of charging. This second-generation Shenxing ultra-fast charging battery is the world's first lithium-iron-phosphate battery that reaches a peak 12 C-rate. C-rate refers to the rate at which a battery charges or discharges relative to its maximum capacity. The higher the C-rate, the faster charging or discharging occurs, with an 800-km range.

Also in April, it launched the CATL Freevoy dual power battery. Each battery pack is divided into two independent energy zones, or high-voltage systems, effectively giving the vehicle a dual-engine configuration. Even if one side is damaged in an extreme collision, the other side can take over seamlessly in a matter of milliseconds.

On June 10, CATL announced that it has started the mass production of its next-generation, high-capacity energy storage cell—the 587Ah cell, which enables a 25-percent gain in overall system energy density.

In December, CATL will begin selling sodium-ion batteries, which can retain over 90 percent of their charge at temperatures down to minus 40 degrees Celcius, for use in hybrid cars and trucks.

In addition to power batteries and energy storage batteries, CATL also provides batteries for emerging sectors such as construction machinery, aircraft, marine vessels and robotics. These sectors have much higher requirements for battery quality and safety than the EV industry.

These innovations have been made on the back of robust research and development (R&D) investment, with CATL's financial statements showing that, from its 2018 initial public offering on the Shenzhen Stock Exchange to today, its total R&D investment has surpassed 80 billion yuan ($11 billion).

"Our pursuit of extreme product performance and rigorous quality standards throughout the whole production process underpins our global ambitions," Wu Zhenhua, CATL's chief engineer of passenger vehicle technology, said in a group interview on August 21.

The company's development has also been spurred on by support from local government organizations. In order to foster a new energy battery industrial cluster in Ningde, the city's government offers CATL and related companies preferential policies in land use and electricity use. The companies also receive financial support from local banks, in the form of a higher line of credit and lower loan interest rates.

Ningde's goal is to encourage the strongest players to play a leading role in its efforts to build an industry cluster, which lets more businesses and places get involved in the supply chain so that they can also make money.

CATL's presence in Ningde has attracted more than 80 upstream and downstream enterprises, allowing leading companies like CATL to meet 80 percent of their procurement needs locally. In this way, a globally renowned lithium-ion battery new-energy industry base has been born in Ningde.

Adding to this has been the large influx of talent. CATL alone has more than 20,000 R&D staff, largely in Ningde, attracted by career opportunities ▶▶

and high pay. Together with employees of related companies, they're helping to boost the city's innovation capacity, creating a virtuous cycle of development.

Upgrading traditional industries

While hi-tech companies like CATL are developing domestically and even globally, traditional industries in Fujian are also innovating and upgrading. To bring innovation to its industries across the board, government authorities in Fujian issued a three-year plan for digital transformation in 2022, encouraging businesses to take advantage of advanced science and technologies.

A growing number of businesses have increased their R&D input in recent years, with AI technology taking up a large share. The upgrading of traditional industries not only helps increase the added value of products, but also helps enhance their competitiveness, sparing them from the fate of becoming OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), on businesses that manufacture on behalf of others.

Businesses in Putian City in the east of the province have been manufacturing shoes for famous international brands like Nike, Decathlon and Adidas since the 1980s. The city is now home to more than 4,000 shoe companies, which employ about 500,000 people and create an output value of more than 100 billion yuan ($14 billion) a year.

For many years, despite the high quality of their shoes, shoe businesses have long struggled to establish well-recognized independent brands, which leaves them at a persistent disadvantage within the value chain. "Our strategy is to leverage digital technology to enable customization," said Chen Qixian, chief expert at the Putian Footwear Association, in a group interview on August 19.

SEMS Enterprise, founded in 1991, is an established name in the Chinese sports shoe industry. It has developed, in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Footbird, a foot posture scanner that can scan a foot and capture detailed data about foot shape, pressure and posture within 15 seconds, and uses AI technology to recommend the best shoe style and size for each customer. This technology has made SEMS a shoe-customization smart factory.

"People's foot shapes differ. Even if the size is the same, slipping into someone else's shoes still makes one feel uncomfortable. That is what drives SEMS to make custom-fit footwear," said Gu Weiming, general manager of the customization program. "Our current shoe models cover more than 500 sub-types and sizes. Once an order is placed, it goes to the central order system, which automatically directs production across different lines. It takes as little as two hours to make a pair of customized shoes," said Gu.

A striking advantage of customized sportswear is that the company has very low or zero inventory. As inventory usually erodes a large portion of profits, large-scale smart manufacturing enabled by digitalization helps significantly reduce the company's costs. In 2024, SEMS' revenues hit around 1.5 billion yuan ($211 million), according to Gu.

In recent years, inspired by SEMS' successful example of customization and smart manufacturing, many shoe companies in Putian have transformed from OEM production to the creation of independent brands, thanks to their own independent innovations in technology, materials, design and other areas. At the same time, a series of local shoe brands have emerged, like Fanthuat, Erke, GuiRenNiao and Peak.

The hi-tech and digital transformation sweeping Fujian is not only influencing emerging industries and decades-old industries like footware manufacturing, but is reshaping a centuries-old industry—the white tea industry—as well.

White tea is one of China's six traditional tea categories. Fuding City in northeast Fujian has been producing white tea for 1,400 years and is known as the hometown of white tea in China. In 2024, 380,000 people in the city were involved in business related to white tea and the total economic output of its white tea industry stood at about 15 billion yuan ($2.1 billion).

Fujian Pin Pin Xiang Tea Industry Co. Ltd., established in 1992, has es-

A workshop of SEMS Enterprise, a footwear company in Putian, Fujian, on August 19. The company's intelligent production line can manufacture customized shoes in just over one hour

XINHUA

Tea is dried in Daping Village, Fuding City in Fujian, on April 10, 2024. Fuding is a major producer of white tea

tablished a white tea refining production line. Taking the tea through a six-step refining process, the hands-free production line completes the work that otherwise requires 50 skilled employees. After tea leaves pass through this line, only 75 percent of the white tea will remain. The other 25 percent undergoes deeper processing and extraction for incorporation into products such as hand creams and toiletries, according to Li Caiping, executive director of Pin Pin Xiang.

Pursuing high-quality production and value adding has allowed Pin Pin Xiang to maintain its business despite sluggish tea consumption in China in recent years. The company is just one of the white tea producers in the region that have taken these measures to maintain their viability.

To ensure the quality and safety of white tea, all tea gardens in Fuding are pesticide-free. A big data-based platform that tracks the entire supply chain—from tea garden to tea cup—was launched in 2019. Technologies such as satellite remote sensing and drone mapping are used to collect data from the 24,012 hectares of white tea gardens and 3,137 processing entities. As a result, consumers can see every step of the tea's journey, from planting to processing, by simply scanning a QR code. By 2024, the system had intercepted 120 tons of subpar tea leaves, helping ensure product quality. The massive data collected also inform the local government's formulation of industry policies and tea producers' planning and management.

In addition to enhancing production efficiency and product quality with advanced automation as well as smart operations, Fuding's villages have integrated tea growing and processing with tourism to promote rural revitalization. Chixi Village in Fuding is said to have triggered a nationwide poverty reduction campaign after its poverty was reported by newspaper *People's Daily* in 1984. The village has now benefited from the upgraded tea industry and rural tourism. It is now home to 12 white tea companies and six cooperatives. In 2024, the per-capita disposable income of the village's residents hit 39,487 yuan ($5,546)—or 1.7 times the national average for rural residents—with more than 40 percent of the income coming from white tea.

As a pillar industry in Fuding, white tea is not only improving livelihoods, but also presenting the Chinese tea and tea culture to the wider world. In 2024, Fuding exported 1,200 tons of white tea to Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia and other regions, with dedicated Fuding white tea stores in Germany and France. In May, the Fuding White Tea Culture System was designated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System. **BR**

(*Reprting from Fujian Province*)

Copyedited by G.P. Wilson
Comments to panxiaoqiao@cicgamericas.com

A Century of Teaching

The Crook family's multi-generational legacy in China By Li Nan

As the box opened, golden rays burst out, with the medal inside gleaming like sunlight. At the center of the medal is a dove spreading its wings above Earth, circled by flower petals. "Here we have the Friendship Medal, which my mother received in 2019. It's the highest honor China gives to a foreigner," Michael Crook, a 74-year-old British and Canadian dual citizen born in Beijing, told *Beijing Review*.

Michael Crook's mother is Isabel Crook (1915-2023), a Canadian educator who lived and worked in China for more than 90 years. She witnessed and participated in the development of China's foreign language education. For him, the medal represents not just his mother's service, but the family's century-long devotion to bridging cultures through education.

A family of educators

For more than a century, her family has devoted itself to education in China, from the classrooms of Chengdu in Sichuan Province to the lecture halls of Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), and to an international school that enrolls students from around the world.

"Education has been the main profession of my family," Michael Crook said. His mother Isabel Crook was born in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, to a Canadian missionary couple over 100 years ago. Her father, Homer Brown, served as the Dean of the Education Faculty at West China Union University in the city. Her mother Muriel Brown, following the same path, founded the first Montessori kindergarten in Chengdu and later became the principal of a primary school there.

The family's teaching tradition has continued into Beijing. "My mom and dad were both teachers and professors at *Beiwai*," Michael Crook recalled, using the Chinese abbreviation for BFSU. His parents began teaching English in 1948 at the forerunner of today's BFSU, at the invitation of the Communist Party of China. His father, David Crook, born in 1910, continued to teach at BFSU until his death in 2000. "He enjoyed his teaching here," Michael Crook said while visiting his father's statue on the BFSU campus. His mother had taught there until her retirement at the age of 66 in 1981, and later she also went to northwestern China to help with foreign language teaching. She trained the first group of interpreters for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China. The couple participated in the development the first college English curriculum after 1949 and the compilation of a Chinese-English dictionary. To commemorate their services, the BFSU erected statues of both of them after they passed away.

His parents were close to their students. One of their stories in particular has stayed with him. "My parents both loved the outdoors, often skating on a frozen lake at a park near BFSU during winters," Michael Crook said, adding that as they sometimes took students skating with them, his family had a large collection of skates of different sizes. One winter, as a student changed from shoes into skates, Isabel Crook noticed he had no socks. "Some students were actually quite poor then. There was a need," Isabel Crook told her son.

That story helped inspire the Crooks Scholarship, established in 1996 with contributions from the Crook family, colleagues, and former students. Initially, it was need-based, supporting low-income students. As living standards in China rose,

COURTESY PHOTO

Michael Crook (first right) talks to students of Bailie Vocational College in Shandan, Gansu Province, on May 28

COURTESY PHOTO

David Crook (1910-2000) and Isabel Crook (1915-2023) at the school that was the forerunner of Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) in 1948

COURTESY PHOTO

Isabel Crook (front center), a Canadian educator who lived and worked in China for more than 90 years, and her students from BFSU in 1978

its focus shifted toward recognizing achievement and dedication.

Michael Crook remembers one moment that revealed the scholarship's reach. When he arrived at the Great Hall of the People for a rehearsal of the Friendship Medal award ceremony, which he attended on behalf of his then 104-year-old mother in 2019, a young person told him, "I'm the interpreter for President Xi Jinping. And I received the Crooks Scholarship for three years."

Michael Crook paused, his voice softening. "I just felt so proud. I thought, wow, my parents' dedication, their years of service to BFSU, is being remembered."

For nearly 40 years, Michael Crook has been blazing his own path in education. "Together with friends, we started an international school just over 30 years ago. This is the Western Academy of Beijing (WAB)," he said. The school emphasizes cultural understanding across its curriculum. "We have a China Studies office," he explained. "Instead of just holding courses in China Studies, we help teachers teaching different subjects to integrate Chinese culture across the curriculum."

On a tour of the WAB school grounds, Michael Crook stopped in front of a black wall. "It's our Peace Wall," he said. The wall is inscribed with sayings about peace in different languages, contributed by students from around the world: "Peace is our gift to each other." The wall, he explains, embodies the school's mission to promote peace.

In 2004, Michael Crook received the Chinese Government Friendship Award, a national-level award for foreign experts working in the country, in recognition of their contribution to China's development.

His daughter, too, has taken up the profession of teaching, working as a kindergarten teacher in Beijing. "I think education is a wonderful vocation," he said. "You don't make lots and lots of money, but there's a lot of joy to be had in seeing young people grow and learn skills."

Promoters of peace

The Crook family's contributions extend beyond education. During the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), both his parents were deeply involved in Gonghe—the International Committee for the Promotion of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives. Founded in 1939, the organization helped organize Chinese war refugees into production cooperatives and also established schools and hospitals, including the Bailie School for orphans and displaced children.

Today, Michael Crook carries that legacy forward as the chair of Gonghe and a board member of Beijing Bailie University, a continuation of the former Bailie School. "The good work that was started 80 years ago still continues. In peacetime, it is mainly about poverty reduction," he said.

At more than 70 years old, Michael Crook has seen China transform in ways his young parents could hardly have imagined. "China has totally changed. Almost the entire population now ends up with at least nine years of compulsory education, whereas in my parents' day, very few people were literate in the country."

And so the Crook legacy continues—one family, four generations, a century of dedication to helping others learn, in a country that has itself been transformed by education. **BR**

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TOGETHER LET'S HELP LITTLE FLOWERS BLOSSOM

A Colorful Canvas

The International Grand Bazaar is a popular sightseeing and shopping destination in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. At the heart of the site is a pedestrian street where history, culture and cuisine converge. Here, visitors take in striking architecture, sample local delicacies, enjoy traditional dance and music, and browse through handicrafts that embody Xinjiang's rich cultural heritage. **BR**

(*Text and photos by Wei Yao, reporting from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*)

Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon
Comments to weiyao@cicgamericas.com

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1. Fruit on sale at a stall at the Grand Bazaar Pedestrian Street in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on September 23

2. Generations unite at the bazaar

3. The Grand Bazaar Pedestrian Street on September 23

4. A floral arrangement celebrating the 70th anniversary of the founding of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region

Beyond the Imagination

By Abdilahi Ismail Abdilahi

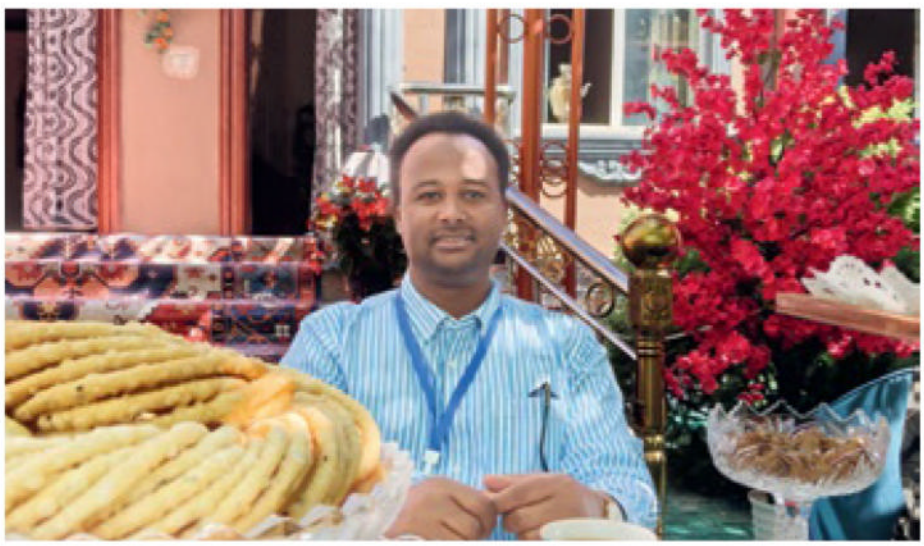
Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region had always been, in my imagination, a land whispered about in stories and celebrated in songs and with photographs so vivid they seemed unreal. Its beauty seemed distant and almost mythical, and I carried with me this longing to go there for years. So when the opportunity arose to visit the region on a weeklong study tour, I seized it without hesitation.

From the moment we arrived, I felt time stretch. In Bole or Bortala, a steppe city in north Xinjiang that was our first stop, evening light lingered well into the night, as though the sun too was reluctant to leave. There was a golden hour that seemed to last for ages, casting a honeyed glow on everything. Though we had no formal plans that night, I couldn't bear to stay inside. With a childlike urgency, I dropped my bags and set off into the soft light, pulled by the hum of music and laughter drifting from a nearby park.

There, people danced with a grace that seemed both practiced and spontaneous. Strangers waved and smiled, drawing me into conversations I hadn't expected. As we journeyed deeper into the region, landscapes unfolded that seemed sculpted from dreams. Vineyards stretched in quiet abundance, their fruit impossibly sweet, kissed by the sun and time. I wandered through rows of grapes and fruit trees, tasting the labor and care of the people who tended them. There was a quiet pride in their voices as they spoke of their land, not boastful, but rooted in belonging.

We passed through places where lakes shimmered like glass and small villages nestled against vast backdrops of desert and mountain. One afternoon, I found myself in an open-air hot spring. It was in Zhalemute, a township in Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, surrounded by a silence so complete it felt sacred. The sky above was endless, and as I looked up through the rising steam, I felt momentarily suspended between earth and heaven, as though the boundaries between body and landscape had blurred.

COURTESY PHOTO



The author enjoys local cuisine in a village in Yining City, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on August 27

It was this feeling of being held within something larger than myself that defined much of the trip. Standing on the shore of Sayram Lake, Xinjiang's highest and largest alpine lake, I felt it again. The water was impossibly clear, the stones beneath visible as if under glass. Snow-capped mountains rose in the distance, their reflection dissolving into the lake, creating an illusion where sky and water became indistinguishable. In that stillness, I walked the lake's edge and, with each step, the clutter of daily life, worries, deadlines and obligations fell away.

In the final days of the tour, we returned to the city, but the magic did not fade. The streets bustled with life, lined with trees with blooming flowers. Shops overflowed with goods, and people wore traditional garments in bright, celebratory colors. Once again, hospitality greeted me at every turn. Invited into a local home, I was met with a spread of Xinjiang cuisine so rich and generous it felt ceremonial. I wasn't a tourist. I was a guest. I was family.

One of the most profound moments came in the Ili Prefecture Museum, where ancient artifacts and historical documents told the story of Xinjiang, not as a remote frontier, but as an inseparable part of China's shared history. Here was a place where cultures had intertwined for centuries, where diversity had not divided, but nourished something greater. I saw, with clarity, that Xinjiang is not simply beautiful. It is vital.

Returning to Beijing, I carried with me more than just photographs and memories. I returned with a sense of having touched something essential, something rooted in history and yet reaching forward with energy and promise. Xinjiang is vast, and we barely skimmed its surface. But even that brief encounter was enough to transform me. **BR**

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Beijing Review Vol.68 No.1 January 2, 2025

by Beijing Review (Author) Format: Kindle Edition

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Beijing Review **is China's only national English newsweekly published by China International Communications Group Center for the Americas.**

Product Details

ASIN: BOBTKKP3G4
Publisher: Beijing Review (January 2, 2025)
Publication Date: January 2, 2025
Language: English
File Size: 1396 KB
Text-to-Speech: Enabled
Screen Reader: Supported
Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled
X-Ray: Not Enabled
Word Wise: Enabled
Sticky Notes: On Kindle Scribe
Print Length: 90 pages

Now available on amazon

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Website: www.chinahoy.com.cn